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Summary: El is finally allowed to see her friends- she still can't go out, though- after closing the gate, but as long as she's got her friends with her, she'll be fine. Mike finally has El back, but he's not that same happy little boy he was back in '83. Sure, he's happy that El is back in his life, but he still has his moments.

1. Chapter 1

Hey guys! This was out a lot earlier than I expected XD. Not much is different, I just went and rewrote a few scenes, edited and removed and added stuff- I didn't rewrite it COMPLETELY, but I hope you guys like it!

A lot of things will be different but still happen, and I'll explain in each chapter.

Since I split up each chapter, I plan to update once every week- on Mondays. I know I say that all the time but I've done it with another story so I think we'll be good XD.

As of right now, you get a chapter a week for thirteen weeks XD

Tuesday, November 6, 1984
1 AM

"Mike, calm down already." Dustin said, groaning as the thirteen year old continued pacing in front of everyone. Mike glared at him and he shut up.

"She's strong, she'll be alright." Joyce said, standing up and stopping him, putting her hands on his shoulders. He bit his lip and looked at her.

"I can't lose her again." he said softly.

"I know," she nodded, "and you won't, Sweetie. I'm sure they'll be back soon."

"It's been an hour since we got back." he said, biting at his thumb nail.

"Hey, they're fine, Mike, okay? He's kept her safe for a year and he'll keep her safe for as long as possible. You know that." Jonathan said. Mike nodded, practically falling onto the couch.

Almost immediately after, headlights shown through the window and

before Mike could get up, Nancy said,

"It's mom."

"Mom?" he asked, confused. She nodded. Not even two seconds later Karen started banging on the door and Nancy opened it, immediately tackled into a hug.

"Christ, mom, I'm fine, calm down."

"Where's your brother?" she asked, pulling away and looking at her daughter, making sure she wasn't hurt. Someone must have called her. Nancy nodded in the direction of Mike and Karen pulled him up quickly, hugging him tight. "I haven't heard from you two *at all* and I get a phone call saying that you've had a few rough and crazy days? What the *hell* is going on?"

"Who called you?" Mike asked, face squished into her shoulder.

"Michael Aaron Wheeler! That is *not* the point!" she scolded.

"His middle name is Aaron?" Dustin whispered to Lucas, who shrugged.

"Now is not the time to be a smartass." Karen told him. Mike rolled his eyes and wiggled out of her hold, crossing his arms over his chest. "Don't roll your eyes at me!"

"Mom, he's had a rough night- we all have. Cut him some slack."

"I wish I knew what you were talking about, but I don't, do IT?"

"Oh my *God,* mom, just stay out of it!" he exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air. "I can't deal with this right now." he walked out the door and slammed it on his way out. Karen sighed angrily and turned to Nancy.

"Where have you been the last couple days? Neither of you have even gone to school!"

"Don't start with me too, mom, we have a good reason."

"Well?"

"Karen, calm down." Joyce said, "We'll explain everything once Jim gets back."

"Are you in some sort of trouble, Nancy?" Nancy rolled her eyes and followed her brother out the door. Karen sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, and then looked at the kids, who were slightly wide eyed and looking at her. She then noticed Will lying on the couch with his head in Jonathan's lap- so pale he nearly matched the white in the hospital gown he was wearing. Next she saw a beaten up Steve Harrington and then the drawings all over the place. She gaped and looked at Joyce, who nodded.

"We've had a mess the last couple of days. I'm going to need to talk to Jim before we talk to you. There is a lot you don't know."

Before Karen had a chance to respond, headlights shown through the windows- broken windows, and she heard her son yell out the letter *L* . Everyone else rushed out the door so she followed, only to see her son hugging a shorter figure as if his life depended on it.

"I was so worried." Mike whispered to her.

"I'm sorry. Back now, like I promised." he chuckled wetly.

"Hey love birds! We're her friends too!" El giggled tiredly and she and Mike let go of each other and El went to hug them all. Mike stood with his back facing everyone for a couple of seconds, trying to discreetly wipe his eyes, having gotten emotional hugging her.

"You alright kid?" Hopper asked, putting a hand on his shoulder. He sniffed and nodded, looking up at him.

"I'm fine." he said. "Just relieved she's okay," he bit his lip and looked at the ground. "I'm sorry."

"For?"

"For the way I acted earlier."

"It's okay, kid. Everyone breaks down every once in awhile. I think

you needed it." Mike nodded in agreement. He turned around and walked to the group along with Hopper.

"Hopper." Joyce said, motioning for him to follow her. He raised an eyebrow but did so. They stood on the porch while everyone hugged El and talked to her. Karen sort of stood on the sidelines, unsure of what to do.

"What's wrong?" Hopper asked.

"We have to tell Karen." he furrowed his brows. "And I mean everything. Steve called her and told her that Mike and Nancy had a rough couple of days and she came over immediately, thinking they were hurt and asking questions." Hopper sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"You do know that she and *Ted* are convinced that El is a Russian Spy?" he asked, "And that they know Mike kept her in their basement for a week?"

"Yes I'm aware of that, Hopper, but dammit, we need more than two adults to know about her."

"But you don't know what they would do. They could end up getting her killed!"

"Hopper, you and I both know that Ted Wheeler isn't good for shit, he would make a call to someone and wouldn't worry about it again. As for Karen, I know she gossips about *everything* but if she knows everything thats happened, that her *children* are involved, she won't tell a soul." Hopper sighed, pausing for a few seconds.

"Fine, fine. We'll tell her. Let's not go *too* into detail, though." she nodded in agreement and he turned to the group. "Everyone, get inside and Nancy, help clean El up some, would you? Joyce and I need to talk to Karen." Nancy nodded and the group made their way inside, El under Mike's arm as she wrapped her arms around him. Once the door was shut and a cigarette was lit, Karen said,

"Well?" Hopper rubbed a hand over his face and blew out the smoke.

"It all started the night Will went missing..."

"Nancy!" They heard El call from the bathroom a while later. Nancy had got a shower started for her and the younger girl had finally finished washing all the gel out of her hair and getting rid of the dirt and grime all over her.

"Duty calls!" Nancy joked as she got up, and got few laughs as she left to go help El. She had the clothes on and was using the towel to squeeze the water out of her hair.

"You ready to dry your hair?" Nancy asked. She nodded. "Do you know what a hair dryer is?"

"Yes." she nodded again. "Hop has one, but it doesn't work."

"Okay good. I'll have to get you one that works." El smiled at her. By the time Nancy finished drying her hair, she had El giggling. When they were done, Eleven's hair was hanging right above her eyes, and looked like Mike's when he blow dried his.

Nancy cleaned up the small mess of water on the floor and El timidly walked back into the living room, smiling when she spotted Mike on the couch beside Will, who was now sitting up. She joined them, curling up beside Mike, and gave Will a small smile.

"Hi, El." he said, grinning at Mike and then her. She assumed Mike made a face because Will chuckled, coughing a little.

"Hi." she whispered. "It's nice to meet you."

"You too, finally."

"Oh yeah!" Dustin exclaimed. "This is the first time you two have actually talked."

"This is the first time they've *seen* each other." Lucas said, smacking him.

"I saw him while he was sleeping." El said. "But… that doesn't count. He didn't see me." She tilted her head, looking at Mike. "Did I say that right?" He nodded with a wide grin.

"Hopper's been teaching you, I assume?" Jonathan asked. She nodded.

"I can read and write some." She said with a shrug. Mike bit his lip, hardly able to keep the grin off his face.

"Mike?" she asked.

"Hm?" he looked down at her

"You didn't break your promise." she said. He raised an eyebrow in confusion. She smiled and said softly, "You promised me a home." He then remembered, and smiled.

"I did, didn't I?" she nodded.

"I'm home."

"So… you're telling me that this… this *man* has been keeping children with *abilities* locked up and doing experiments on them?" Karen asked carefully. Hopper and Joyce nodded. "He forced them to kill people, and animals?"

"From what little El has told me, yes." Hopper nodded.

"That's horrible and sounds like a plot to a movie or TV show." she said, running a hand over her face.

"Karen, I can assure you, this is not a plot to a movie or TV show." Joyce said. "Trust me, I understand that this seems unreal and insane, but it is. For God's sake, the man had an exact replica of my sons body made and we had a funeral for him because everyone thought he was dead, when in reality, he was in another dimension."

"Doesn't the fact that they were trying to hide it from you sound weird?" Hopper asked.

"All of it sounds weird." Hopper snorted.

"We can prove it to you, when El is strong enough again. She might seem like she's fine in there, but I can promise you she's exhausted. She's fascinated with that boy of yours, and she hasn't seen him in nearly a year." he nodded his head back towards the door- clearly talking about Mike.

"He was the first person to show her kindness, of course she is." Hopper shook his head.

"Nah, she really likes him, Karen. It's… it's annoying, to say the least. All she would do is talk to me about him, tell me everything he told her that week. She never forgot it." he took a puff of a new cigarette, passing it to Joyce. "She was able to see him, told me he cried the first hundred days he called her. Of course, he was still upset, but she said he seemed angry."

"She's why he's been acting out." Karen realized. "Because he missed her." Hopper nodded. "Ted surely isn't helping the situation, either. It's late, I need to get them home." Hopper snorted.

"Good luck dragging Mike away from her." Karen rolled her eyes.

"Michael, we need to-" Karen started to say, but stopped as soon as she saw that her son was asleep, both arms wrapped around El. She let out a quiet sigh but smiled a little at the sight.

"Go on home, Karen, he'll be fine here. We'll bring him home tomorrow." Joyce said. Karen nodded.

"Nancy, are you coming?" she turned to her daughter, who nodded.

"Uh, yeah, I really need a shower." she said. She kissed Jonathan on the cheek and left with her mom.

"Are you guys staying here too?" Steve asked Dustin, Lucas, and Max

"I mean, I can't exactly go home while Billy is here passed out on the kitchen floor." They had moved him out of the way a while ago.

"I don't have a key to my house. Gotta wait for mom to get up. It's useless." Dustin shrugged. Steve rolled his eyes.

"Of course you don't. Sinclair, what about you?"

"I'm staying." Steven nodded.

"Okay, well, just give me a call tomorrow if you need a ride home." he left too. Those who were awake looked at each other, Dustin and

Lucas beginning to giggle at their friends, all cuddled up together on the couch.

"Oh grow up." Max glared at them. They stopped and looked at her. "According to you two and Will, he has been depressed and heartbroken since she left, give him a break."

"I'd have to agree with her, boys. Let him be happy- let them both be happy. When you fall in love with a girl who loves you the way they love each other, you'll understand." Joyce said. Hopper let out a cough from the other side of the room. "Oh shut it, Hop, you know they're in love." he started grumbling as he stood and went to the kitchen to get a drink. He opened the fridge and the Demogorgon that Steve and Dustin had stored in there fell out.

"What the hell?" He yelled waking both Mike and El up. El glared at Hopper through the wall.

"What?" Dustin asked, and then saw the Demogoron on the floor. "Oh, about that, uh..." Hopper just ignored him and took the slimy, disgusting thing out to get rid of it. Dustin pouted.

"Dude, what would you have done with it anyway?" Mike asked tiredly.

"I don't know, I could have handed it over for scientific research or somet-" A pillow smacked him in the face and he saw Mike glaring at him and El looked sad. "Oh, shit, I'm sorry, I didn't mean-"

"I know. It's okay." El said. She yawned and stretched, bumping Mike in the forehead on accident. "Oh, sorry Mike." he chuckled.

"It's okay, El. Wanna lay down?" she nodded and he put an arm around her and she put one over his stomach, putting her head on his shoulder.

"You need to eat more. Too skinny." she mumbled, but everyone heard her. Mike snorted.

"Oh he eats all the time, Sweetie." Joyce said. "All the boys do. They're growing boys."

"Eat more eggos." she said. Everyone laughed at that.

"That's why I'm so fat." Hopper said, joining them on the other side of the couch, giving Mike the *I'm watching you* look. Mike rolled his eyes.

"You're not fat, Jim." Joyce said, rolling her eyes. He scoffed and looked over and saw the two kids already asleep, and then heard a loud snore and saw Dustin, Lucas and Max passed out on the floor. Jonathan had long since retired to his room, and Will was in his bed asleep.

"Looks like it's just us." Joyce said. He nodded and rubbed at his eyes. "Do you think we have to worry about the lab anymore?"

"God, I hope not. I made sure to put an idea in Owens head before we went and closed the gate." Joyce raised an eyebrow and he explained.

"Oh, I certainly hope so. She deserves it." Hopper looked at El, who was like a daughter to him, and nodded.

"She really does."

The next morning, Mike woke up, unable to move. He looked down and saw El, and then smiled. He reached up and pushed some hair out of her eyes. He looked around and saw Dustin, Max, and Lucas still asleep on the floor, Joyce and Hopper were in the kitchen, and Will was sitting in a chair watching TV.

"Hey." Mike said quietly, trying not to wake her up. Will looked at him and grinned.

"Hey."

"You feeling better?" Mike asked.

"I haven't felt this good in a long time. What about you?" Mike glanced down at El and nodded.

"So much better it's crazy." Will grinned at him again.

"I'll be even better when I get food in my belly." Will joked. Dustin sat straight up at the word *food* which woke the other two up.

"Food? What are we eating."

"Well, apparently Hopper went to the store and got some eggos and some other things." El's head popped up sleepily when eggos was said, much like Dustin had done.

"Eggos?" Mike laughed as she sat up. She scooted away from him so he could sit up too and then scooted right back so she was close to him.

"When all the other food is done we'll make you kids some eggos!" Hopper called.

"You guys need to call your parents and make sure they know you're okay and that you'll be home later." Joyce called. They all groaned and did so. "Food is ready!" Joyce yelled and they rushed into the kitchen. When their food was put in front of them, they all began to stuff their faces.

"Hungry, huh?"

"We only ate breakfast yesterday." Mike said, and the others nodded in agreement.

"I haven't ate in three days." El said with a mouth full of food. Everyone looked at her.

"Why?" Joyce said. She shrugged innocently.

"You still need to tell me where you've been for the last couple of days, young lady." Hopper said, pointing a fork at her. She swallowed her food and took a sip of orange juice.

"Went to see mama." she said. "And sister."

"Sister?" Everyone chorused.

"Sister." she nodded. "Eight." she added.

"As in...?" Joyce asked.

"Experiment number eight." she told them. "With me when I was younger. She escaped."

"Where is she now?" Lucas asked. She shrugged.

"They were getting revenge on people that hurt them. Tried to get me to find them. I found one, but I didn't kill him. I was supposed to, but he had kids." She shoved a forkful of eggos into her mouth and paused for a few seconds. "I told her I had friends that I had to go back to and help. She wanted me to stay but I couldn't. I had to come back. Nice lady on bus talked to me though." she smiled at that. Everyone didn't know what to say.

"She had others with her?" Hopper asked. She nodded.

"Police were shooting at us." she pushed her empty plate back and looked at them.

"Wow." Dustin said in awe.

"What kind of abilities does she have?" Will asked.

"She can make you see stuff that isn't... real. She showed me a butterfly. It was pretty. And..." she stopped talking then, kind of dazed, her eyes beginning to water.

"El?" Mike asked softly. She looked at him and blinked.

"She showed me papa." she whispered. Everyone looked at each other.

"He's gone now, El. He can't hurt you anymore." Mike said. She looked at him.

"Promise?" she smiled. He smiled back and grabbed her hand.

"Promise."

2. Chapter 2

Tuesday, December 11, 1984

After school, Mike and El sat in the basement in El's fort while Mike read to her. The two were waiting on Lucas, Dustin and Will to come over. When he finished the chapter he folded the corner of the page and put the book down so she looked at him, head tilted in confusion.

"So, uh, do you remember last year when I asked you to the snowball?" he asked, fidgeting with the cover of the book.

"Yes."

"There's gonna be another one on Saturday if… if you maybe want to go?" he asked nervously. She gasped quietly in excitement and nodded.

"Yes! I have to ask Hopper though. Hopefully I can." she said. He nodded, smiling at her softly. They sat quietly for a few minutes, Mike playing with her hair. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"Oh, uh, braiding your hair." he said.

"Braiding?" he nodded.

"Yeah, it's like… you take three pieces of hair and twist them together- when Holly gets up from her nap I'll see if she'll let me braid her hair so I can show you. And when you're hair gets longer, it'll be easier to braid. I can really only just do small pieces right now."

"Never cutting my hair again." she said, shaking her head, her soft brown curls flying all over the place. He chuckled.

"Well, you might want to get it trimmed every once in awhile. That's what I do because I have a lot of hair and it gets long quick." he told her. She looked at him in confusion. "Trimming is when you cut just a little bit off. They won't be cutting it all off."

"Oh."

"My mom says it helps it grow back faster too." her eyes widened, a smile forming and he laughed.

"Mike! El!" Karen called. The two scrambled up awkwardly and made their way up the stairs.

"Yeah?" Mike asked, reaching the top. Lucas, Dustin, and Will were there, along with Joyce and Hopper.

"What's with the hair?" Hopper asked, an eyebrow raised. All she said was,

"Mike." she grinned at him and with a blush, he grinned back at her.

"Figures. Let's take a seat in the living room and talk." he said. He, Joyce and the kids all sat in the living room and Karen stayed in the kitchen with Holly

"Are we in trouble?" Dustin asked.

"No, no one's in trouble. Dr. Owens gave me something today." he said, trying not to smile. He looked at Joyce who grinned, resting her chin on her hand. He took something out of his pocket and unfolded it. "This is a birth certificate. For Jane Eleanor Hopper." Everyone's jaws dropped and looked at each other. El grinned in excitement. "Remember when I asked you when you wanted your birthday to be?" he asked and she nodded. "Well, according to this, you were born on November 7th, 1971. You're thirteen years old." she got up and rushed to hug him. He smiled and hugged her back. Everyone hugged her too and Mike kissed her on the cheek before she sat back down.

"Dr. Owens did tell me that we should wait another year before you start really going out and doing stuff." That wiped the smile off her face, along with the other teens. "But, since I don't want to keep you hidden and stuck in a house for another year, I'm not taking his advice. Now, I'm not saying you can walk around town freely. For the first couple months, the only places you can go are here or Joyce's house." she smiled slightly, biting her lip. She liked the sound of that- of course, she wanted to go out and be normal like everyone else, but

this was better than nothing. "But I have two rules." she frowned again, tired of so many rules. "One, you cannot use your powers under any circumstance. Unless you or any of your friends are in actual, immediate danger, understand?" she nodded. "And two, you need to wear this." he handed her a box with a tiny pink bow on top. She opened it and there was a charm bracelet that had an E, a heart and what looked like a waffle.

"Is that a waffle?" Lucas asked, looking at it.

"That it is." Hopper snorted. "I had Mike help me out with it."

"Yeah, the guy thought I was crazy when I asked if he had a waffle charm." Mike said. "He didn't but he made one for us."

"This is cool." she grinned at him. "Thank you." she looked at Mike and took it out of the box. "Help me?" he nodded and helped her put it on her wrist.

"The bracelet will help cover your tattoo, along with what I gave you a couple weeks ago, so I want you to always wear it, okay?" Hopper said. She nodded, smiling.

"I love it."

Friday, December 14, 1984

Mike was relieved when he finally got home after school, Troy wouldn't stop bothering him during his last class and he was pissed at the world. Though, at this point, he was *always* pissed at the world.

"I couldn't even finish my work so I'm the only one in class that has homework." he grumbled to Nancy, who was helping him and the others with their homework.

"He's just a giant dick, dude, ignore him." Dustin said.

"Dustin!" Nancy threw a balled up piece of paper at him. He grinned.

"Sorry Nancy."

"Idiot." she mumbled. The phone rang and Nancy got up to get it. "Mike! It's El!" She called. He perked up and went to the phone.

"Hey El!" he said excitedly, just the thought of her cheered him up.

"Hi Mike, guess what?"

"What?"

"Hopper finally said that I can go to the snowball with you."

"Really? That's awesome!"

"Yes. I have to go, Hopper is teaching me math. I wanted to tell you."

"Okay, well, if you need any extra help with it I can try and help. I'm okay at math."

"Okay! Bye Mike!"

"Bye!" The two hung up and Mike went back to the kitchen, noticeably happier.

"What was that about?" Will asked.

"Hopper is letting her go to the snowball tomorrow night."

"Ooh, are you going as dates?" Dustin asked, fluttering his eyelashes. Mike felt his cheeks heat u.

"Shut up." he ignored the question and went back to his work as Dustin and Lucas giggled. Max and Nancy just looked at each other and rolled their eyes while Will just continued his drawing since he finished his homework already.

"How come Will always has his homework done before us?" Dustin whined, eyeing Will.

"Because Will has has priorities in check, whereas you two like to make fun of my brother and his girlfriend instead of doing yours." she replied. Dustin and Lucas instantly quieted and started working again.

"She's not my girlfriend." Mike grumbled, rolling his eyes.

"Well then what the hell is she, Wheeler?" Max asked. He glared at her and shrugged. "Cat got your tongue?"

"Whatever, Mayfield."

Saturday, December 15, 1984

"Hi Mrs. Byers!" El waved as she saw Joyce walk in, with a dress, shoes, and another bag- she didn't know what was in that.

"Hi Sweetie! Are you excited?" El nodded excitedly.

"Yes!"

"Well, let's get to work, we have to be back in two hours to help Will get ready." El nodded and led Joyce to her room, where she got started on El's hair.

Two hours later

"Hey El, you excited for your little date with Mike?" Jonathan joked when she and Joyce arrived back at the Byers house. El furrowed her brows in confusion.

"Date?" she asked.

"Figures Hop wouldn't tell you about that." Joyce muttered to herself. "A date is basically when two people that like each other go out and have lunch, dinner or, anything really, including dances."

"Me and Mike are going on a date?" she asked. Joyce smiled.

"You sure are." El's smiled widened.

"Mom!" Mike complained, resisting the urge to stomp his foot like a toddler.

"What? You look so handsome! Oh come on, don't look at me like

that, this is your first dance!" Karen exclaimed as she took pictures of him. Nancy walked down the stairs, looking as beautiful as ever. "Oh my goodness, your turn!"

"Mom!" Nancy chuckled as she posed for the pictures.

"You two stand together. I want to take a couple before you two leave." They brother and sister stood next to each other while Karen took pictures of them. "Don't they both look great, Ted?"

"Uh huh." he didn't even look at them. Mike had to literally bite his tongue to keep from getting smart with him.

"Just ignore him, Mike." Nancy said quietly. He just grumbled to himself. They finally left after another million pictures, as Mike put it.

"I don't understand why he's such an ass. He doesn't even care." Mike rambled. As he did so, Nancy listened to him, commenting every once in awhile. Once he finished his rant, she said,

"I know he hasn't been the best dad, Mike, but at least he's around. I know all his old ass does is sleep, eat and start arguments, but we're lucky that we at least have him."

"Yeah, but he's never acted like a dad, to any of us. He's never *tried* to take me to a sports game, and no, it's not because *he knows I wouldn't like it*, or anything like that, and he's never taken you to those father daughter dances that you used to want to go to."

"You're right. Completely right." she said, glancing at him. "I hate that he's never spent time with you like he's supposed to. And honestly, I don't care that we never went to those dances, mom was the main reason I wanted to go and some of my friends told me that they weren't as awesome as mom said. You know how she likes to exaggerate stuff." she nudged him and he smiled a small smile. "But you're his only son, you'd think he'd go out and do stuff. You should get tickets to the next football game and see if he wants to go."

"Gross." he shuddered and she rolled her eyes. "What if he doesn't?" he asked, biting his lip.

"Hell, if the sorry ass doesn't go, ask Hopper. I'm sure he'd love to go to a football game."

"I don't know about that, I think he wanted to kill me when El told him I asked her to the snowball."

"Nah, he likes you. He just wants to scare you a little bit."

"Oh, he's scared me more than a little bit, that's for sure."

When they arrived, Mike immediately went to join Lucas and Max at a table and Nancy went to give Jonathan a quick kiss on the cheek and went to tend to the punch bowl.

"Where's El, Dustin and Will?" Mike asked upon reaching the two.

"Right here!" Dustin almost yelled as he and Will walked up.

"Dude, what the hell happened to you?" Mike asked Dustin.

"What?"

"You look like you have a birds nest on your head." Lucas tried to touch his hair and Dustin slapped his hand away.

"I worked hard on this you assholes!" he grumbled.

"Mom and Hopper are talking to El before she comes in." Will told Mike quietly. Mike nodded. Soon, it was just Mike sitting alone at the table. The others were up dancing, even Dustin and Nancy- he quickly decided not to question it. He was just glad he was enjoying himself. *Every Breath You Take* began playing and the gym door opened, and walked in El. He looked up and saw her, standing up. She looked around until she spotted him and they walked towards each other until the met in the middle.

"Wow, El...you look beautiful." she looked up at him and smiled in thanks. "Do you, um, want to dance?"

"I...don't know how."

"Me neither, wanna figure it out?" she nodded and smiled. He took

her hand and led her on the dance floor, near Dustin and Nancy. "You put your hands, uh, here." he put her hands on his shoulders, "And I put mine here." he put his hands on her waist nervously. She smiled. They started swaying back and dancing, Nancy and Dustin just grinned at each other, shaking their hair around, and Lucas couldn't keep the grin off his face, until Max pulled him in and kissed him. After she pulled away, he was shocked, but then went back to his cheeky grin and she turned pink, resting her forehead on his shoulder. Will was having fun dancing as well, and Mike and El just stared into each other's eyes, smiling. Nancy and Dustin looked over at the two just in time to see Mike kiss her. He pulled away, blushing and she smiled widely and put her forehead against his as they continued dancing. Dustin looked at Nancy, his mouth wide open.

"That was the cutest thing I have ever seen." she said, and then rolled her eyes at Dustin. "Oh come on, you know it was. Be happy for him, Dustin."

"Oh I am, I'm just surprised he had the balls to do it." he said. She rolled her eyes once again.

"I don't think I've ever seen a group of kids curse as much as you guys do. And this is the second time they've kissed, according to Mike."

"Yeah, Mikey boy!" he exclaimed even though Mike couldn't hear him. Nancy just laughed and shook her head at him. "Do you think that… that Mike will be happier now that El is back?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said honestly, "I really hope so." He nodded in agreement. After two more dances, Jonathan cut in and asked to dance with her. Dustin looked sad, but Nancy said,

"Save me another dance or two before the end of the night, okay?" she winked at him and he grinned and nodded. He went back to the table where everyone had also decided to stop dancing.

"I see you had a lot of fun dancing with Mike's sister, huh?" Lucas asked. Dustin grinned and Mike rolled his eyes.

"Did you two have fun?" Dustin asked Mike and El, who both nodded, cheeks turning pink. "I saw you two kiss but I'm not gonna make fun

of you for it, you know I just like teasing you." El stuck her tongue out at him. He cackled.

"I saw Max kiss Lucas." Will said cheekily.

"No way." The two blushed furiously, although they were holding hands under the table, just like Mike and El.

"Attaboy!" Dustin smacked Lucas on the shoulder, causing the others to laugh.

"Hello, ladies and gentlemen!" Mr. Clarke said, walking up to the group. They all waved. "Are you guys having fun?" he asked, pulling up a chair to sit with them.

"Yes sir." They chorused.

"Well good! I'm glad! Have we met?" He said to El, who looked at Mike like a deer caught in headlights. No one had asked about her until now.

"This is the chief's adoptive daughter, Jane, but we call her El because her middle name is Eleanor." Dustin said immediately. Hopper had mentioned his adoptive daughter to Flo, who had mentioned it to Powell and Callahan and half the town knew about her at this point. Way sooner than Hopper liked, that's for sure.

"Don't you have a cousin named Eleanor, Mike?"

"Uh, yeah. She went back to Sweden. She was just visiting."

"Oh, that's right! She had blonde hair, didn't she?" Mike nodded. "Ah, okay. Well, it's nice to meet you, El! Are you going to be attending next semester?" she didn't know what that meant but figured it was about school so she said,

"I'm home schooled." That's what Hopper told her to say if someone asked.

"Ah, okay. Well, I better get back to chaperoning." he joked, standing up. "If you ever need help with school, El, just let me know. I'd be glad to help." she smiled at him and nodded and he walked away.

"So, what are we doing after this?" Dustin asked.

"My mom said she's gonna order pizza when we get back and hang out in the basement." Mike said, taking a sip of the punch that Nancy insisted he drink.

"Have you finished the next campaign?" Will asked him.

"Not yet, I just have to do a few more things and it'll be done. By next Saturday for sure."

"You better, 'cause you've been slacking, Wheeler." Lucas said, giving him a knowing look. Mike rolled his eyes.

"Oh shut it, Sinclair."

"I'll see you later this week, okay?" Mike said as he was saying goodbye to El. She nodded and smiled at the picture he handed her. It was one that Jonathan had taken of them together.

"Thank you." she made sure Hopper wasn't looking and quickly pecked Mike on the mouth and hugged him goodbye before he could react. She was in the car by the time he came back to reality. He smiled and waved at her as Hopper drove away. She waved back at him and he then heard,

"How sweet!" he turned around and saw Nancy watching him, the door wide open. He blushed furiously and glared at her. "Oh come on, don't be mad. That was adorable." She grinned at him and nudged him in the side as he trudged passed her, grumbling about how she didn't understand the aspect of privacy. She just laughed as she went upstairs while he went to the basement with the rest of his friends.

3. Chapter 3

Hope you guys are enjoying this so far! :D I'm working on PM guys, I promise. It's just taking a lot longer than we all hoped XD

Wednesday, December 19, 1984

When Mike got home after school- thankfully today was the last day before break- he went up to his sisters room and knocked on the door. He heard a faint, "Come in!" and opened the door.

"Hey." he said, standing at the foot of her bed.

"Hey, how was school?" she asked, looking up from her notebook. He shrugged.

"It was okay, I guess. Troy was out sick. " he told her. "I got tickets to the game."

"You did? I didn't think you would, honestly." he rolled his eyes at her. "Ask him when he gets home."

"I am, but he'll either ignore it or come up with some bullshit excuse not to go."

"Well, if he says no, ask Hopper to go." he bit his lip and nodded, standing up to leave the room. "If he does, don't hesitate to call him out on it, Mike." she said. "Tell him like it is." he smiled at her and nodded.

Instead of asking when he got home- Ted was asleep in his Lay-Z-Boy before Mike even had a chance to- he asked during dinner.

"Hey dad, I got tickets to the last football game on Friday. Do you want to go?" he asked hopefully. Ted took a sip of his drink and said,

"You know how busy I am, Michael. I doubt I'll have time to go." Mike scoffed and pushed his half eaten plate away from him, leaning back in his chair.

"God, you are *so* full of shit, dad. Literally all you're gonna do is-"

"Don't you talk to me like that, I'm your father."

"-sit in your damn chair and sleep! You may be my *father* but you sure are a shitty one. Mom, can I be excused?" Karen sighed and nodded. Mike wanted to say much more, but considering he respected his mom and sisters enough not to, he bit his tongue and went up to his room.

"It's the truth, dad. You want him to be in to sports and shit, but when he asks you to go to a football game with him, you have some stupid excuse? What the hell?" Nancy grumbled, "Can I be excused too, mom?" Karen nodded once again, and joined her, picking up Holly and taking her upstairs, leaving Ted, alone, at the dining room table again.

Nancy knocked on Mike's door, "Hey, can I come in?"

"Whatever," he huffed, and she opened the door to see him sprawled across his bed, face buried in a comic.

"I'm sorry about him." she said, sitting next to him.

"It's not your fault. I honestly don't care anymore. It's obvious he'd rather eat and sleep than hang out with his son. He'll regret it one day."

"Hell yeah he will. He's gonna regret a lot, trust me." she squeezed his shoulder comfortingly. "I'm gonna get ready for bed. If you need me just knock on my door, okay?" he nodded. She ruffled his hair and left the room, shutting the door behind her.

He sighed, closing the comic and tossing it on the floor, pressing his hands into his eyes.

I'll ask Hopper tomorrow. Mike decided. *If he says no too, it won't bother me. I'm not getting my hopes up anymore, screw this bullshit.*

Thursday, December 20, 1984

"I'm gonna ask Hopper later tonight. He wants to show El some Christmas lights." Mike told Nancy as he sat down for breakfast.

"Oh, that's sweet!"

"Yeah, she's never seen them. Or a Christmas tree for that matter. Mrs. Byers has told her all about decorating and stuff and El wants to help her decorate their house."

"Awesome! I've gone through all my old clothes and found some I think she'd like. I'll bring them out to her when Hopper picks you up." he nodded and started eating.

He just kept thinking about how excited El was going to be when she sees the lights. He hung around the basement all day, Lucas coming over for a while and they played Uno and a couple other games.

"Did you ask your dad about the game?" Lucas asked, looking at Mike. As Mike looked at his cards, Lucas looked at him- really looked at him. He had dark circles- well not *dark,* but they were definitely there- under his eyes and he looked exhausted. Mike sniffed slightly, putting his card down.

"Yep. He said no, saying he was busy. You know what he's gonna be doing."

And Lucas did know, he's known Mike since they were six, and Ted was old back then- never did anything. He paid people to cut grass and fix things rather than doing it himself. When he wasn't on business trips, he was home asleep or eating. Nothing has changed over the seven years of knowing the Wheelers.

"I'm sorry, man." Lucas said, putting down his own card. Mike shrugged.

"It's okay, I'm used to it at this point."

"I know." Lucas replied sadly, the *you shouldn't be* left unsaid. "Are you okay, though?"

"Yeah, why?" Mike asked, confused.

"You just look tired, is all."

"Oh. Yeah, I'm fine." Mike waved him off. "Just hard to sleep sometimes." he said, "Wanna play another game? Uno is getting boring." Just like that, the subject was dropped. Lucas knew better than to push him, though, so he went along with it.

Lucas left a little after six, and Hopper arrived not long after. By the time Mike had his coat and shoes on, Nancy had already taken her clothes out to Hopper and come back in.

"Will you be home by dinner?" Karen asked as Mike walked down the stairs.

"Hopper said he's going to order them pizza." Nancy answered for him.

"Okay, well, I trust that Jim won't keep you out late." Mike nodded, rolling his eyes when Karen looked away. Nancy snorted and started up the stairs.

"Have fun with your girlfriend and her dad tonight, Mikey." she teased.

"She's not my girlfriend!" he exclaimed, glaring at her. She just laughed.

"Well what is she then, Mike?" Karen asked, grinning at him. He huffed.

"I have to go before he gets mad." he said. She chuckled.

"Have fun and tell them I said hello. I love you."

"I will, love you too mom." he ran out to Hoppers blazer.

"Hey kid." he said, giving him a half smile.

"Hey Chief."

"Call me Hop."

"Huh?" Mike raised his eyebrows at him

"You know you heard me." Mike chuckled nervously and nodded.

"Okay, Hop."

"How's your break been so far?" he asked a while later, attempting to talk to the quiet teen. Mike shrugged.

"It's been alright, Lucas came and hang out with me for a couple hours. I uh, actually wanted to ask you something." Hopper raised an eyebrow.

"Is this about El or...?"

"No, no sir. I uh, I got two tickets to the football game tomorrow night yesterday and I um, I wanted to know if you wanted to come?" he asked, looking at him, biting his lip. Hopper looked at him, kind of surprised. He didn't expect the kid to ask him that- or that he'd been interested in *football* of all things.

"Well, I don't have to work tomorrow… Don't take offence to this, but I didn't think you would be into football, kid." Mike sighed.

"I'm not." he replied. "My dad is, though. I got the tickets and asked him to go with me to… you know, *bond* I guess, but he doesn't care to do that."

"He's a dick." Hopper said. "Well, why don't we give the tickets to Powell and Callihan and we can do something you actually like?"

"Like what?" Hopper snorted.

"Kid, I don't know what you like, accept you kids love the arcade. El has mentioned *that* place to me multiple times." Mike laughed at that. "We can go there, teach me how to play some of the new games. We could go bowling if you like that-"

"I've never been." Mike told him. Hopper made a face.

"How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

"You've never been bowling and you're thirteen? What?"

"There was a field trip to the bowling alley when I was in sixth grade but I was sick and couldn't go. I've held a bowling all before- well, I wouldn't say I held it because if was too heavy." Hopper snorted.

"We're going bowling then." he told the teen with a grin. Mike nodded, sitting up a little straighter. Hopper parked the blazer on a path in the woods and got out, motioning for Mike to follow. "It's about a five minute walk to the cabin." Mike nodded and basically jogged to keep up with the larger man. "Watch out for the tripwire." he warned and Mike cursed as he nearly tripped over it. Hopper covered up a laugh with a cough and knocked on the door.

"Hi Mike!" El said excitedly, almost immediately tackling him in a hug when she opened the door. Hopper couldn't help but smile at how excited she was. She was all bundled up in a big coat, a hat that Mike had given her, one of Hoppers overly big scarves and gloves.

"You ready to go kid?" he asked her. She nodded excitedly.

"Oh, wait." she ran to the kitchen and grabbed another pair of gloves, handing them to Hopper. "Forgot these."

"Oh, thank ya, kid. She's gotta keep me straight." Hopper joked with Mike, who grinned back at him. "Alright let's go, by the time we get back to town most of the lights will probably be on." she nodded excitedly. "You alright getting in the back?" he asked Mike, who nodded.

"Yes sir." Hopper went around to his side while Mike awkwardly got in the back, bumping his head on the door frame.

"Ow." he mumbled and El giggled. He smiled at her. She got in and once the teens were settled, Hopper started off. El messed around with the radio until she found a station playing Christmas songs.

"The Christmas tree lighting is Sunday." Mike said. "With the parade thing and all."

"Ooh, can we go?" El asked.

"Maybe, we'll see." she grinned at Mike, knowing that was a yes.

"Look El!" Mike pointed out the window. She looked at where he was pointing and gasped. She stared at the lights in wonder as Hopper slowed his truck down so she could look at them better. There were other people walking around the neighborhood with their kids and showing them the lights.

"You two want to get out and go look?" Hopper asked. El looked at him and nodded excitedly. He found a place to stop and parked, and El immediately got out to let Mike out. He once again bumped his head on the doorway.

"Ow. Again." she giggled even harder this time and Hopper chuckled.

"God, you're getting tall, kid." he said, shutting the door behind him.

"It's a curse, I tell ya." Mike joked, fixing his hat. Hopper chuckled.

"Whoops, hold on." Hopper said and grabbed a camera out of the truck. "Joyce made me promise to take pictures so, say cheese!" he snapped a picture of them before they could even react, which then had them laughing and he took another picture. Hopper gladly took pictures of his adopted daughter and her...boyfriend? He didn't know what was going on there but he decided to ask Mike eventually. Sure, he was pretty protective of her, more so now that she was actually going out-somewhat- around people instead of being stuck inside all the time. He trusted Mike, and could tell he was head over heels for her, and she was too, even though she didn't know it.

"Mike, what is that?" El asked, grabbing Mike's hand and pointing at the top of someone's house, where a lit up Santa Claus and reindeer were.

"That's Santa and his reindeer."

"Like in the movies?" she asked. He nodded, smiling at the face she made. She pulled him down the sidewalk, pointing at things and asking him what they were even if she kind of knew what they were. "What does a candy cane taste like?" She asked.

"Remember those little red and white candies I give you?" Hopper asked her, walking on the other side of nodded. "That's what they taste like."

"Oh! Can we get some?" she asked. He chuckled and nodded

"Sure thing, kiddo. Hey, you two stand here and I'll take a picture of you." They stood in front of one of the particularly brightly lit up houses, an arm around each other, their noses and cheeks pink with the cold, smiles on both of their faces. He took the picture, and then kind of squatted down to their heights and turned the camera around and took a picture of the three of them. They all laughed and continued walking, El mesmerized by the lights.

"What's up lil Wheel!" Steve called, jogging up to them. Mike gave him a look, much like the one he gave him when he called him Nancy in the back of the car.

"Lil Wheel?" El asked, confused.

"It rhymes." Steve shrugged. She shrugged too, still confused. "You guys having fun looking at the lights?" He asked, walking alongside them.

"Yes!" El immediately answered. He chuckled.

"She's never seen Christmas lights before." Mike told him.

"Oh really? You guys should check out my house, my parents go all out for Christmas- even though they're gone most of the month. It's a couple houses down." Mike bit his lip at that, he was well aware of how Steve was alone in the house most of the time.

"You up to it, Hop?" Mike asked. Hopper looked at him, an eyebrow raised. "I just mean..." he started rambling again.

"You know you ramble a lot?" Hopper asked. Mike blushed and nodded. He chuckled. "Yeah, I'm up to it. I need a good workout anyway."

"Awesome." Steve said, grinning. They still walked slowly, so El could look at every detail she possibly could. When they reached Steve's

house, she was amazed. She couldn't even speak.

"Damn." Hopper said as Mike said,

"Wow. How the hell?"

"Like I said, they go all out. It's a pain in the ass putting it up and then taking it down a month later." he said. Just about every inch of the house was covered in lights, and there were little Santa Claus's, reindeer, candy canes, anything you could think of, spread out all over the yard.

"This is..." she thought of the right word.

"Amazing?" Mike asked, and she nodded, wrapping her arms around him and putting her head on his shoulder. He hesitantly put his arms around her too, almost afraid to in front of Hopper, and rested his cheek on top of her head. Hopper took a picture of it. He was definitely gonna be the dad that documents every single thing possible. After looking at a couple more houses, Steve said his goodbyes and went home Hopper, Mike, and El made their way back to Hopper's truck.

The trio went to a couple other neighborhoods and then got pizza, taking it back to the cabin to eat it, and Hopper made them hot chocolate. It wasn't a very good combo, but the two didn't argue. Mike almost immediately began to stuff his face, which made Hopper laugh.

"Hungry?" Mike nodded and continued eating. He barely stopped to drink any of his drink. "Slow down there, kid, don't want you choking on anything." he chuckled. Mike blushed and swallowed his food, drinking some of his drink.

"Uh, ha, sorry. I don't know why I'm so hungry."

"You'll probably have another growth spurt soon or something." Hopper said. El put her pizza down and looked at him confused.

"What is growth spurt?" Mike snorted quietly but she ignored it.

"It's when someone grows a lot over a short period of time." Mike

explained to her.

"Oh. Is that why you're tall and skinny?" This time, Hopper snorted, loudly. Mike blushed and nodded.

"Uh, yeah." he mumbled and continued eating while she giggled.

4. Author's Note

Hey guys, sorry I'm late with the update! I started a new job last Thursday at the last minute and I haven't had time to finish with the chapter or work on any for my other stories.

I'm sitting with an older lady that my mom has known her entire life, and considers her her second mom. Her name is Amanda and she is in her 70s, and she just got out of the hospital last Thursday, and I stayed with her for five days and four nights and she had me hunting for stuff in every part of the house every few minutes. If I find something she'll mess with it for a little bit then ask me to get something else XD. I'm still staying with her as I write this note, but she's getting stronger everyday and can get up and do some stuff on her own, so I won't have to be here all the time like I have been. Once I get a good schedule set up with her, I'll be able to work on my stories again.

I'm not saying I'm stopping, though, not at all! I'm working on them, slowly but surely. For Phenomenal Mutiny I have less than 500 words, like way less, and the next chapter of C2 is about 500 I think. I'm also working on the ST/The 100 story when I get the chances, so that is still in the works!

I'm sorry everything's taking so long to get out, longer than usual XD. But I still got ideas, still writing and I'm not stopping for a while, it's just taking a little longer to get them done.

I'm gonna try and have the next chapter of HR done either late tonight or sometime tomorrow!

I have said *I'm* at the start of nearly every sentence omfg

5. Chapter 4

Sorry for taking so long to update, guys! This probably isn't the best but I hope you guys enjoy it!

Friday, December 21, 1984

"Does El know what singing is?" Lucas asked Mike as they rode their bikes over to Dustin's.

"I'd assume so." he said, giving him a weird look. "I mean, she's not stupid, Lucas."

"No, I know. I didn't mean it like that-"

"I know dude, chill." Mike rolled his eyes. "I'm sure Hop's let her listen to his old records or whatever."

"Do you think she'd be game to sing with us at your mom's Christmas Eve party?" Dustin asked the second the two walked in the door.

"Uh, I don't know but I can ask. I doubt she'd even know any of the songs."

"True. Well, if you see her later just ask her." Lucas said. Mike nodded.

"I honestly wish my mom would stop making us sing every year." Mike said.

"Oh come on, you know you love it." Dustin said, nudging him. "When we were younger you used to love it."

"You act like we're in our thirties or something."

"You sure act like it sometimes with your moody ass." Max said as she walked in without knocking, making Lucas scream.

"It's just puberty. He's further into it than us because he's older." Dustin said, giggling at both the fact that Lucas screamed like a little

girl- and that he's convinced Mike's further into puberty.

"You know damn well there isn't a certain age for that, dipshit." Mike grumbled and went to the kitchen. There was a knock on the door so Dustin went to answer it and Max and Lucas just looked at each other awkwardly for a couple seconds, before laughing. Dustin walked back in with Will following close behind.

"Where's Mike?" he asked.

"He's in a *mood* ." Dustin moaned.

"When isn't he though?" Max muttered and Lucas snorted.

"I'm not deaf, you know!" Mike yelled.

"What's up with him, though? Has he said anything?" Will asked, plopping down in a chair.

"He seemed a little out of it on the way here." Lucas said. Will nodded.

"He probably had another fight with his dad. I heard he's been fighting with him since he asked him about the game tonight." Will said.

"How do you know that?" Max asked.

"Nancy, who told Jonathan who told me."

"Oh. Makes sense." Dustin said sadly.

"Apparently, his dad can't say a word to him without him getting pissed. Which is understandable, Ted can suck a-"

"Don't finish that sentence, asshole." Mike grumbled as he walked back in with a cup of water. Lucas snickered. "I'd rather not hear that."

Later on that day, when lunch rolled around, they made themselves sandwiches, which Mike barely ate.

"Are you okay, dude?" Max asked. "You're like… quiet. You usually don't shut up." Mike glared at her.

"I'm fine." he replied anyways. "Just tired."

"You can like, take a nap or something if you want to, Mike." Dustin said. "We'll be quiet. Or if you wanna go home that's totally fine too."

"And listen to my mom complain on the phone with her friends and drink a bottle of wine? No thanks." he rubbed at his eyes. "I'll be fine- I'll take a nap or something when I go home late, before tonight."

"If you're sure."

After that, his mood changed for the better, but he wasn't the usual cheery Mike, but then again, he hasn't been all that cheery in over a year.

"Okay, what the hell?" Max asked Mike as he grinned. She, Mike and Lucas were riding their bikes home. Mike was going with them to take Max home- she was riding with Lucas.

"What?"

"What's got you so hyped up?" Lucas asked. He shrugged and rode his bike in circles around them.

"I do know, though, that I'm taking a nap when I get home." He said. The others just chuckled

"Don't forget to be at Will's house around 5:00." Max told him. He looked at her weird. "To help out with the lights remember?"

"Oh, yeah. I will." They dropped Max off and rode their bikes back to their neighborhood, mostly in silence. Mike was mainly thinking about the fact that December was half way over and the Byers are just now putting lights up, but after the last two years… yeah, he got it.

"I'll see you later!" he told Lucas and put his bike in the garage and went in the house to greet his mom and sisters. "Will one of you wake me up at 4:45?" he asked. Karen and Nancy nodded and he went to

lay on the couch- passing out almost instantly. Karen woke him up at 4:45 on the dot and he sat up, grumbling to himself about how tired he was. She smiled and patted his shoulder. He went to his room and got all his change and anything else he'd need, said his goodbyes and left. He arrived at the Byers house a few minutes after five.

"I was thinking you weren't going to show." Dustin said as Mike walked into the house. Mike looked at him weird.

"Dude, I'm just a few minutes late. It's only, " he looked at his watch and rolled his eyes, "it's only 5:11." Dustin snickered.

"Hey Mike, you willing to get up on the roof and help me? Everyone else is too scared." Jonathan asked. Mike chuckled and nodded. Jonathan got the ladder and held it as Mike climbed on the roof. He joined him as Will went outside to get their stereo and started a Christmas tape. "How good are you with a hammer and nails?" Jonathan joked. Mike acted like he was thinking for a few seconds.

"Eh, pretty good, I'd say." Jonathan chuckled.

"Good. Okay so, here's half of the nails and I want you to put about a foot's distance between each one, starting here." He pointed at the top of the roof, where it started to slope down. "We're starting here and then going all the way around. I'm gonna do this side. Got it?"

"Aye, aye, captain!" Mike saluted him and Jonathan chuckled. Around 5:30, El and Hopper arrived and Mike was literally just about finished, with his, as well as Jonathan's side. Jonathan had eventually left the boy to it and went back on the ground to help everyone else out. Mike was basically using the hammer and nails to let all of his anger and frustration with his dad out. When he finished with the nails, he realized that Hopper and El were there and waved down at them. El waved back at him excitedly and Hopper just gave him a small wave as he went inside to talk to Joyce. By the time he got back down from the roof, Hopper was back outside, ready to leave.

"We should probably get going, kid." Hopper told nodded and looked at El.

"I'll see you after the game, okay?" he told her, kissing her cheek.

"Okay. Have fun." she smiled at him. He and Hopper got in the blazer and Mike waved at everyone as they took off.

The two spent the first thirty minutes at the arcade, Mike showing Hopper how to play the games- the only one he was somewhat good at was Pacman, and Hopper was thrilled to know he got a higher score than Mike.

"I'd probably do better if all my friends weren't yelling at me to go four different ways." Mike huffed, eyes trained on the screen in front of him. Hopper snickered as he took a sip of his drink.

"Sure." Hopper offered and Mike rolled his eyes. Hopper chuckled and went to the bathroom.

"Hey Wheeler." Keith said, Cheeto fingers tapping the top of the machine. Mike froze for a second before backing away from the game and crossing his arms, looking at the older teen with a scowl.

"What, Keith?" he huffed.

"Your sister hasn't even looked my way, you know?"

"For good reason too, what's your point?"

"You told me that you would help me get a date with her over a month ago, Wheeler. After I helped you figure out who that girl was."

"First off," Mike hissed, "I never said I'd get you a date with her. That was *Dustin* . I would never try and set her up with a disgusting pig like you. And second, you didn't help us figure out shit, we figured it out on our own."

"Is there a problem here?" Hopper butted in, standing next to Mike, crossing his arms.

"N-no sir." Keith stuttered and rushed off.

"Has he put his hands on your sister, Mike?"

"Not that I know of, but if he has I swear to God."

"I'm gonna have a talk with her later, then, see if he's bothered her any. She can charge him with harassment if she wants to or think she needs to." Mike nodded. "I'm glad you're protective of your sisters, Mike. I'm protective of mine too."

"You have sisters?" Mike asked, surprised. Hopper chuckled and nodded.

"That I do, it's been years since I've seen them. I should probably get in touch with them soon… Anyways, I see this *Keith* kid watching us like a creep so do you wanna go to the bowling alley now?" Mike nodded.

"Definitely." he said. "Did you see his Cheeto fingers? He's the reason I don't eat Cheetos."

"You don't eat Cheetos?" Hopper asked, furrowing his eyebrows. Mike shook his head.

"Nope."

"You're a weird kid."

"That I am."

On their way to the bowling alley, Hopper asked,

"So, I've been meaning to ask but, uh, are you and El...You know," Mike raised an eyebrow, "are you boyfriend and girlfriend or...?" Mike blushed.

"I haven't asked her yet." he scratched the back of his neck. "I don't think she knows what boyfriend and girlfriend is- or well, maybe she does, but she hasn't said anything." Hopper chuckled.

"I'm sure if she hears the words she'll ask eventually. Either me, you, Joyce, or even Nancy." Mike nodded. "And I can tell how freaked out you are because you think I'm gonna give you *the talk* but I'm not. At least, not yet, because I trust that you're a good kid and won't hurt her, because you and I both know that if you broke her heart she'd probably break your leg." Mike snorted and nodded at that.

"Yes sir. I don't plan on it. Ever, and that's a promise. I don't break promises."

While Mike and Hopper were gone, Lucas, Dustin and Will ran around outside in the snow while El and Joyce stayed inside and watched a Christmas movie while they were decorating the tree and the inside of the house. Halfway through the movie, she heard the word *girlfriend* . She's heard it before, and kind of understood the concept of it, but she wasn't sure so she asked Joyce,

"What would you call a girlfriend? And boyfriend?" Joyce looked at her, an eyebrow raised. "I know a little bit, but it's confusing still."

"Well, being boyfriend and girlfriend is when you go on dates, you know what a date is, right?" El nodded. "You hold hands and kiss. There are other things for when you're older, but I'll explain it then." El looked kind of confused at that but nodded anyway.

"Like me and Mike?" she asked.

"Well, yes, I guess. Has Mike asked you to be his girlfriend?" she shook her head. "Hm, he's probably just nervous. You know, you could ask him to be your boyfriend." Joyce said, smiling at her when her eyes lit up.

"I can?" Joyce nodded. "I thought boys had to ask girls."

"They usually do, but girls can ask boys too. There's nothing wrong with that." El nodded, a smile on her face. A few minutes went by until El asked,

"Are you and Hopper boyfriend and girlfriend?" Joyce almost spit out her drink when she asked that.

"Uh, no, we're not. We used to be, a long time ago."

"Why not now?"

"Well...we just drifted apart. I met the boys dad and he moved out to the city."

"You drifted back together though, right? Kind of like me and Mike?" Joyce smiled, and nodded.

"We did."

"You should ask him to be your boyfriend." El said, grinning widely. Joyce chuckled.

"We'll see." Around the end of the movie, El asked another question,

"Can I call Hopper dad?" Joyce looked down at the girl.

"Well, that's a question you should ask him, but I think he'd love it if you did." El grinned.

"The birth certify thing says he's my dad."

"Birth certificate." Joyce corrected her, but nodded. "Yeah, it does." El smiled. The boys came inside, followed closely by Max, Jonathan and Steve.

"When did you two get here?" Joyce asked Steve and Max.

"A few minutes ago. Dustin called me and told me to pick her up and come over." Steve said. Joyce chuckled. Dustin basically had Steve wrapped around his little finger.

"Ah, okay. Well, I'll go make some hot chocolate while we wait on Mike and Hopper." They all grinned and nodded as she went in the kitchen. Jonathan followed her to help her, knowing she puts way too much sugar in it. The kids joked around with Steve for a few minutes until Hopper and Mike finally walked in with a couple of bags in their hands.

"What do you have there?" Joyce asked, smiling at the two. Hopper explained while Mike joined the others, hugging and giving El a quick not so subtle kiss.

"We went to the store on the way back and got some candy canes for El, since we didn't get any last night, and a couple of ornaments that Mike thought she'd like."

"Awe, that's sweet of him."

"I also got you these," he grabbed a bag of chocolate covered raisins and handed them to her. She smiled. They're her favorite.

"Thanks Hop." he grinned back at her. They went in the kitchen to talk while the others began to help put ornaments on the tree, Joyce and El having already spread the branches out and put the lights on it. El was amazed by all the different ornaments, and would get frustrated when they didn't want to stay on the branch, so Mike helped her. Considering he could almost reach the top of the tree now, it wasn't that tall of a tree, she was just short, he put the ornaments where she wanted them.

"Who do you think should have the honor of putting the star on the top of the tree?" Jonathan asked.

"El." Mike fake coughed in his arm. Everyone laughed at that. El grinned at him and then at everyone else. Joyce handed her the star and Hopper picked her up so she could put it on top. Everyone clapped as they admired the tree, and El hugged Hopper.

Around nine o'clock, Steve left, taking Dustin and Max with him to drop them off. Jonathan had gone in his room to work on a project, so Mike, El, Lucas, Will, Hopper, and Joyce watched another Christmas movie. During a particularly quiet part of the movie, Mike sneezed loudly, causing the others to jump. He sneezed again, his hair flying wildly.

"Oh God." he sneezed again and Lucas and Will started laughing.

"Bless you." Joyce said, chuckling.

"Thank *sneeze* you."

"Well, this is gonna go on for about ten minutes so we might as well pause the movie." Lucas said. Mike sneezed again as an answer. El just looked at Mike with the most ridiculous look on her face. He would have laughed if he hadn't sneezed again.

"I'm gonna *sneeze* go to the bathroom." He sneezed again and did as he said. He came back a couple minutes later, shaking his head. "I

hate when that happens." Lucas snickered.

"I, personally, think it's hilarious."

Saturday, December 22, 1984

"I don't understand, Ted. Why don't you ever want to spend time with us?" Karen asked her husband, who was sitting in his Lay-Z-Boy.

"I'm tired. And I don't want to go to some silly little parade. It's for children." Karen just shook her head and took Holly out to the car to put her in her car seat.

"Are you aware that you *have* children, *dad* ?" Mike asked.

"Mike." he heard Nancy say, trying to get him to stay out of it.

"I mean seriously, you have kids, and you *never* do anything with us? I mean, what's the point of us even calling you dad?"

"Michael, you will not speak to me like that!"

"Or what? What're you gonna do? Ground me? Take away my bike? Go ahead, because I don't give a *shit.* " Nancy was surprised, right along with Ted, because Mike usually tried not to curse in front of their parents. "But you know what? It's fine, because, it's not like you give a shit now, nor will you give a shit any other time. And another thing, how are you tired when you literally do nothing but sit your ass in that damn chair and watch the TV?" Mike walked towards the door, not even waiting for a response, and rushed Nancy out.

As he walked out of the house, he slammed the door behind him as hard as he could. He joined his mom and sisters in the car, silently fuming. They're meeting everyone at town square, where the parade is. Nancy decided not to say anything to him, knowing it'd probably piss him off even more.

See, the thing is, when Mike gets as mad as he is now, he starts crying, which pisses him off even more. They parked as close to the square as they could and Mike almost immediately got out and made his way over to Hopper, El, Joyce, Will, and Jonathan. He was

furiously wiping at his eyes as he walked.

"Mike!" El exclaimed excitedly when she saw him. He gave her a weak smile and waved. She frowned, noticing how sad he looked. Before anyone else had a chance to say anything to him, El grabbed his hand and walked him over to a tree a couple feet away from them. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"My… it's nothing, really. I'm okay, El."

"Friends don't lie, Mike." she said, giving him a look. He sighed, giving in.

"I had another fight with my dad."

"Did he say something to make you sad?"

"No, no, I'm not sad or anything. Just… I'm just an angry crier, I guess." she raised an eyebrow.

"Angry crier?"

"It's when you get so mad all you can do is cry, basically."

"Oh." she bit her lip. "I've done that." he just nodded. He wouldn't look at her so she put her arms around him and pulled him into a hug. He buried his face in her hair, hugging her back.

"What's up with him?" Hopper asked Nancy as she joined he, Jonathan and Will, who were sitting on the sidewalk. Karen was standing with Joyce, talking.

"He kinda chewed our dad out." she said.

"Huh?"

"Yep, but I don't blame him to be honest. He never does anything. Literally, nothing. Except sit in the chair and watch TV and eat. Or go to work, and he basically does the same thing there as he does at home. He said the parade is for children, and Mike called him out for it."

"What'd he say?" Will asked.

"He asked him if he was even aware that he has children." she said. "He even asked him what was the point of even calling him dad since he doesn't act like one."

"Wow."

"Damn."

"Well then."

"Yeah. I don't have the nerve to say something like that to him. Our mom doesn't either."

"When I was that age, and I said anything like that to one of my parents, I'd get my ass beat." Hopper said. "But, I mean, I don't blame him either. I'd like to pop Ted one good time in the face myself." Hopper said, which caused the three to laugh.

"Mike?" El asked softly, still hugging him.

"Hm?"

"Be my boyfriend?" she asked sweetly, releasing him just enough so she could look at him. His eyes widened at that.

"Uh, uh..." he let out a nervous laugh, but nodded. "Yeah, I uh, I was going to ask you...Eventually." she smiled widely and pecked him on the lips quickly, hoping Hopper wouldn't see. He smiled back at her. "Um, we should probably go back over to them. They keep looking back at us." she nodded and they let go, and she grabbed his hand. Hers were freezing cold, but his were warm. They walked back over to the small group, and El grinned at Joyce, who just grinned back at her.

"Hey, what's this?" Hopper asked, looking between the two.

"What?"

"Do you two have some silent conversation going on over there or something?" the two shrugged and said at the same time.

"No." he eyed them anyway, but turned his attention to Mike.

"Hey, kid." he held a hand out. Mike shook it and said,

"Hey Hop." Hopper could tell he'd been crying because of the redness of his eyes, but didn't comment on it.

"What time does this thing start?" he asked. As if on cue, music could be heard as the parade began. It was starting at the square, and then going through town. After the parade itself, there are games and different stands for food or drinks. Dustin, Lucas, and Max ran up to them, out of breath.

"Sorry we're late, my mom wouldn't let me leave until I found my gloves, which is why I have socks on my hands." Dustin said, holding his hands up to show them. They laughed. Everyone sat down on the sidewalk except for Mike and El, who stood behind Hopper and Joyce. Mike wanted to make sure she could see everything. She did, and she was amazed. She danced along with the music playing, and eventually had Mike dancing with her, which Jonathan made sure to record. When the parade was over, Jonathan and Nancy wandered off, which meant,

"Mike, could you take Holly to ride the ponies?"

"Mom!" he whined. She gave him a pleading look and he sighed. He reluctantly let go of El's hand and bent down to Holly's level. "Wanna go ride a pony?" he asked. She nodded and gave him a sweet smile.

"Yeah!" he grinned and nodded. He stood up and picked her up, holding her with both arms. She's a heavy little thing, and normally, he'd just hold her hand, but she's known to wiggle her way out of his grip to run off.

"Hey Hop, can we go show the ponies to El too?" Mike asked, giving him the puppy dog eyes.

"Don't you even try to..." He looked at Mike and rolled his eyes. "One day, I'll be able to resist you kids puppy dog eyes. Yes, you can show them to her. Make sure she's in between someone, and there is someone behind her at all times. And do whatever you want, I gave

her some money, but be back here by the time they turn the tree back on, got it?" Everyone saluted him, except Mike, because he currently had a giddy four year old in his arms. He ruffled El's hair and smiled at her. "Go have fun, kid."

"Thank you dad!" The kids then made their way towards the ponies.

"Dad, huh?" Joyce asked. She and Karen grinned at him. He grinned.

"Yeah, she asked me if she could call me that when we got to the cabin Friday night. I'm not gonna lie, I shed a tear or two when she did."

"Awe, Hop!" Joyce gave him a side hug, and he held her there when she started to pull away. Karen smiled at the two, but they noticed the sadness in her eyes.

"Are you okay, Karen?" Joyce asked. Karen chuckled.

"Not really, no."

"Do you two want to go inside where it's warm and get some coffee?" Hopper asked, gesturing to the little cafe that was still open. "And we can talk about it if you want to." They both nodded, and the parents went on their way, as the kids laughed at how excited Holly was riding the pony. El was kind of sad that she couldn't ride one, since she apparently weighed too much according to the guy running it, but she was happy with being able to pet them.

"Hey, maybe next year, when the fair comes to town, you can ride the horses they have." Will told her. She furrowed her brows.

"Fair? Horses?" She looked at Mike for an explanation.

"Horses are just big ponies." He said. "They're taller. The fair is kind of like this, but bigger and has a lot of rides. It's fun."

"Yeah, if you like these types of things, you'll love the fair." Max told her. She grinned.

"It comes two weeks, I think, before school starts back in August." Will said.

"Can we go?" El asked.

"We usually go every year. We didn't this year, but hopefully this new year we will." Dustin explained.

"But if Hop says you can, then definitely." Mike told her. She grinned happily and nodded, reaching up to adjust her hat.

6. Chapter 5

I'm sorry for not updating! Like I've said on some of my other stories, I've been busy as hell and there's been a lot going on, and I honestly just haven't been motivated to write. No promises for the next chapter, but I'm hoping a lot sooner than this on!

To those who read the original Home, do you know what I took out of this chapter? ;)

The order in which everything that happened in the original is completely different here, just know that EVERYTHING does happen, just later on in the story.

ALSO I'm changing Mike's birthday to March 7th cause why not?

iAmCC: Omg I love you and I miss you and I can't wait until you come back (if you do end up coming back XD). Thank you and I hope I'm still dong your character justice in PM!

Eventually, Mike spotted Nancy and Jonathan in the crowd, and with a fairly good bit of convincing, they took Holly to get some hot chocolate. He grabbed a hold of El's hand again, and the group of teens walked around the square, looking at the different games or mini-rides.

"What's that?" El asked, pointing at what looked like a house- but instead of straight lines and steps, it was curvy and looked like a balloon she'd once seen, but bigger. It was colorful, too- yellow, blue and red.

"It's a bouncy house." Mike explained. She furrowed her brows

"It's kinda like a trampoline. You can jump around in it." Lucas told her.

"Tramp-o-line?"

"Why don't we just go and show her?" Max asked. They all nodded. Since there weren't any kids in it, the person *watching* to make sure

no one got hurt let the six go inside. They took their shoes off, which confused El, but she followed suit anyway. They got in and started jumping. Surprised, she fell over and was bouncing all over the place.. It felt weird to her, but it was fun. Mike, laughing, stopped jumping and helped her up. He held her hands and gestured for her to jump with him. She did and grinned.

"I asked my mom for a trampoline for Christmas so hopefully I'll get it!" Dustin said loudly.

"I hope so. I love trampolines." Will said, jumping higher than everyone else.

"This is fun." El told Mike, who nodded in agreement. Mike slipped and took El with him. She fell on top of him, the two giggling. Once they realized that El was on top of him, they blushed and managed to get up without falling back down. After about ten minutes of jumping and attempting to do tricks, they got out so other kids could get in.

They walked around for a little while longer, buying a funnel cake to share- El ate most of it and made Dustin promise to have his mom make some homemade ones for when she was allowed to go out next year.

"Is everyone ready?" A random person called. The kids rushed to the square and found everyone except for Karen- which Mike found weird but figured she'd gone to the bathroom or was stuck talking to a friend. The small crowd responded with either yes, hurry up, or just yelled. He counted down from three and lit the tree. The lights had a bluish tint to them, and it covered the tree, and there was a gold star at the top, but it didn't light up. Mike couldn't help but smile at the look on El's face. She smiled at him widely, bouncing on her heels as her eyes went from ornament to ornament, loving how they sparkled with the lights.

"Do you like it?" he asked her quietly. She looked back at him and nodded, the smile never leaving her face.

"Pretty." she replied.

"Yeah...really pretty." he said, not looking at the tree, but at her. Her

smile grew bigger at that. She glanced down at his lips and then back up at his eyes. She leaned in and kissed him.

"Ooh!" Dustin exclaimed. Everyone had seen it. Mike blushed and looked down, afraid that Hopper would kill him or something, while El just smiled widely.

"I'm so glad I got a picture of that!" Nancy exclaimed.

"Boyfriend, girlfriend, or no?" Was all Hopper asked.

"Y-yes." Mike stuttered, his face turning and even darker shade of red.

"Remember what I said the other night?"

"Yes sir."

"Good." Dustin just started making jokes so Mike just looked down and covered his face with his hands in embarrassment. Don't get him wrong, he loved the kiss, but it was just that everyone was staring.

"Shut up dip shit." Max said, pushing Dustin. "It's cute."

"Did you just say cute?" Lucas asked.

"I will punch the both of you." she threatened.

"Nancy, take a picture?" El asked, who nodded happily. El wrapped her arms around Mike, and he finally uncovered his face and wrapped his arms around her hesitantly. Nancy took a picture of them smiling, and took another of El kissing Mike's cheek, causing him to grin the biggest grin he probably ever has. After hanging around the square for a little while longer, they all went to dinner, and Karen finally reappeared. Mike noticed her face was pink and she looked like she'd been crying, but he didn't have a chance to talk to her before Joyce sparked up a conversation with her.

When everyone said their goodbyes and went their separate ways, the Wheeler's made their way home, and when they did, Ted's car was gone.

"Where's dad?" Mike asked as they got out of the car. Karen didn't reply at first, she just sighed and went and unlocked the door.

"Mom? What the hell is going on?" Nancy asked- quite loudly and scared Holly, who backed away from her, bumping into Mike's legs. "I'm sorry Holly." she apologized. "I didn't mean to be loud. Where is dad?"

"And where did you go earlier?" Mike added.

"Mike, Sweetie, can you put Holly to bed for me while I talk to Nancy." It wasn't a question. He sighed and nodded and took Holly's hand to lead her upstairs. Having put her to bed many times before, Mike knew her routine like the back of his hand. He took her in the bathroom to brush her teeth and as she did so, he got her pajamas. When she was done, he got her in her pajamas and brushed her hair for her. He waited for her to fall asleep before making his way back down stairs to the living room.

"Where's dad?" Mike asked and Nancy and Karen looked at each other and then him. Nancy scooted over on the couch to give him room to sit and Karen patted the space. He hesitated but sat down, looking back and forth at them.

"I needed to get some more money so I came home to get it, and when I went into your father and I's room… he was packing a bag." Mike tensed up, already knowing what she was saying. "I asked him what he was doing and he told me that he had a business trip he was going on and had to leave tonight."

"For how long?" he asked. She sighed.

"He said two weeks but… it could be longer, I don't know. We had it out. If you go into our room you'd see stuff all over the floor." she shook her head. "I was throwing pillows at him and knocked some stuff over and off the walls."

"I wish you'd have threw something heavier than a pillow at him." Mike muttered, taking a deep breath. "*Screw* that sorry piece of shit. I wish he wouldn't even come home."

"Michael-"

"I'm serious, mom. I wish he wouldn't. It's not like he's good for anything anyways!" he stood up, crossing his arms and turning back towards them.

"He pays the bills-" she started but he interrupted her again.

"That's all he does, mom! That and eat and sleep, that's it. He doesn't spend time with us- and now he's not even gonna be home for Christmas? What the hell? That's not what dads are supposed to do. They're supposed to love and spend time with their wives, their daughters, their sons- unless I'm seeing everything wrong and men are actually just pieces of shit that make *you* feel like shit."

"I know, Mike." she sighed. "I… I don't know what else to do, we can't leave. Well, we can, but we'd have to stay with your grandparents in Florida-"

"No!" The two siblings exclaimed.

"See? I don't want to take you away from your home. And it's hard to find a good job around here, one to pay these bills."

"Couldn't you divorce him and get child support?" Nancy asked.

"I could, yes, but I don't want to do that, Nancy. Believe it or not but I love him. I shouldn't, but I do. If I hadn't met him, then I wouldn't have you three. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me and I would never take it back, even if it meant never meeting the asshole."

"And we don't want you to keep having to deal with him, mom!" Mike threw his hands in the air. "Don't think we don't see the way you cry, or how you drink a bottle of wine after every fight and talk to your friends on the phone. I see it all the time and I hate it."

"I know, and I'm sorry." Karen rubbed a hand over her face and threw her hair. "I'll figure something out, okay? You two don't need to worry about this."

"I'll worry about it til he's gone." Mike grumbled, crossing his arms

again.

"It's late, and you two should get to sleep. We'll talk more tomorrow, okay?" Karen said, finally. The two tried to argue with her but eventually gave in and hugged her goodnight and went upstairs together, silently.

"Night, Mike."

"Night, Nance."

Mike didn't sleep for very long, maybe three hours, before he woke up, drenched in sweat. It wasn't the worst nightmare he'd ever had- but he was glad he woke up before it *got* worse

All he could hear was screams and gunshots and something roaring- the sound of flesh being ripped apart. He knew that sound well. With a sigh and a groan, he wiped his face with his shirt and got up, changing his clothes. He threw them in the corner and went down as quietly as he could to get a drink of water.

He nearly had a heart attack when he saw his mom sitting at the table with her own cup of water, chin in her hands. She jumped a little when she saw him, but gave him a small smile.

"What are you doing up?" she asked quietly.

"Uh…" *Should I tell her it was a bad dream? Nah, it'll be better if she doesn't know*. "I got thirsty." he told her. She nodded and held her up up.

"Same."

Yeah, I'm sure that's why you're up. I definitely don't see the shiny tears on your face, mom.

"Are you okay?" he asked her, sitting across from her. She nodded.

"Yeah, I'm fine, baby. Don't worry about me." he started to argue but stopped when she gave him a look.

"It's okay if you're not." he said anyways.

"God, you sound so grown." she chuckled and he shrugged.

"I feel like I've had to grow up a little quicker." he said, mostly to himself. "It's not every day you run from the government or hide a superhero in your basement and take care of them." she chuckled, shaking her head.

"I still wish you had said something to me back when this all began." he shrugged. "I hope it's all over, though. El doesn't deserve what happened to her, and neither do the rest of you." he nodded in agreement.

It doesn't feel like it's over. Anything could happen.

"Yeah… you know, she uh… she asked me to be her boyfriend earlier."

"Did she? Go El!" she joked and he smiled a little, nodding.

"Yeah. I was gonna ask her eventually…" he mumbled. Karen grinned.

"I know you were."

Sunday, December 23, 1984

Mike eventually did go back to sleep, and he still had bad dreams- he wouldn't say nightmares for these, honestly. He didn't wake up until about ten the next morning. His reason for waking up was Holly jumping on him before Karen could stop her.

"Jesus Christ." he groaned, lifting his head slightly and looking at her.

"Good morning Mikey." she said sweetly.

"Morning." he croaked and gave a little wave to his mom.

"Alright, Holly, get off him." Karen told her, picking her up and putting her on the floor. "Go wake Nancy up now." Holly giggled and

ran off. Mike sat up and looked at his mom.

"Is something wrong?" she shook her head.

"No, no, I just need to go shopping and I wanted to see if you wanted to come with me."

"If you want me to, I will."

"I wouldn't be asking you if I didn't want you to." she pointed out. He snorted.

"Good point. I wanna get El a present so… What time do you want to go?"

"About an hour. It'll give you time to wake up some more, eat breakfast and get ready." he nodded and stretched, his back cracking. "Christ, Mike, you are too young for your back to crack like that."

"So, where to first?" Karen asked.

"Uh... I don't know." she chuckled.

"We could just start off at the jewelry store next door to where Joyce works." she suggested and he nodded. It was quiet for most of the ride, other than what played on the radio. Karen parked as close to the store as she could and the two got out. When Mike got out, his wallet fell out of his pocket so he picked it up, only to drop it again, not once, not twice, but three times.

"Son of a bitch." he mumbled and they walked into the store, Mike opening the door and allowing his mom to go in before him.

"Ah, Mike! It's good to see you again!" The older man behind the counter said happily.

"Hi Mr. Martin." Mike gave him a smile. "This is my mom." he gestured to her and Mr. Martin smiled at her

"So, what are you looking for today my boy?" he asked.

"Um, something for my girlfriend." Mike said, his cheeks turning pink.

"You finally asked her, huh?"

"She um, she actually asked me. Uh, yesterday." he said, his face burning and he bit his lip.

"Well, that's nothing to be ashamed of! I was too chicken to ask my wife to marry me so she asked me, and we've been married 46 years now." he said, chuckling. Mike grinned at that. "So, do you have anything in mind? Maybe another charm or two for her charm bracelet you and Chief got her?" Mike nodded.

"I was thinking of earrings too but then I realized she doesn't have her ears pierced, so maybe a necklace?" Mike asked.

"Ooh Mike!" Karen exclaimed quietly and he turned to look at her. "What is it you two say to each other all the time? Just promise, right?" she asked. He nodded and she motioned for him to come over to her. It was a plain necklace, just a silver chain, but the charm was the word *promise* in cursive. She hadn't seen a grin on his face that big in over a year, and she wanted to burst into tears at the sight of it. He looked back at Mr. Martin and nodded, the grin never leaving his face.

"I'll take it."

7. Chapter 6

Sorry for such a long wait! I'm still typing on my phone so if there are any BAD mistakes, well, there's your answer. I hope you guys like this one, even though I didn't change or really add all that much. Also, sorry for the little lines/lack of lines, between time skips, I have to post off my phone and the FF app doesn't have the line on it

Monday, December 24, 1984

Hopper let El sleep in an hour or two before waking her, explaining,

"If you don't be a moody little gremlin because I woke you up, I'll give you a surprise." her eyes lit up and she nodded, grinning at him. Normally, she was a little turd in the mornings. Definitely not a morning person.

When she walked into the little kitchen, she looked around for her surprise, raising an eyebrow at him when she didn't see anything out of the ordinary. Hopper chuckled

"Sit at the table and I'll get it." he said. She nodded, her leg bouncing up and down. He went in the cabinet and pulled out a green box. He set it on the table and she looked at it weird.

"What is this?" she asked.

"This is a gingerbread house. Like in the movies." her eyes widened and all he could see were her teeth. "Me and you are going to decorate it today." the smile didn't leave her face as he opened the box and pulled everything out. There were many different candies and pieces of the house, and two packets of icing. She watched him curiously as he ripped open the pack of cookies and set them on a piece of cardboard that came with it. He handed her two of the pieces and she looked at them confused. He smiled and grabbed a pair of scissors, cutting the corner off both packets and handing one to her. "Just watch what I'm doing, okay?" he asked and she stood to watch him.

He put a square in the middle of one of the pieces he had- it looked like a window to El, so that's what it was. Then he put a couple of candies on it like it's a windowsill.

"You basically just do that, but you can put whatever you want on it." he told her. She pointed at the box.

"Can it look like that?"

"You can do it like that, yeah, but it doesn't have to be the same as on the box."

"On the box it's pretty." he chuckled and nodded.

"Go for it, kid."

Despite the fact that she's never done anything like this, her side of the gingerbread house looked a lot better than his did, which she found hilarious. After they decorated each piece they let the icing harden and then put it together, and Hopper took pictures of it, and then a picture of her sitting in front of it grinning.

"You did good, kid. It looks great." she stood up and hugged him. He was shocked, but happy nonetheless and hugged her back.

"Thanks dad."

"You're welcome, kid."

11 11 11 11

"What're you doing, kid?" Hopper asked later on that day, standing behind El, who was at the table with paper and crayons.

"Drawing a picture for Mike for Christmas." she replied.

"Oh, that's… great, kid."

"Draw one with me?" she asked.

"I don't know, I'm not that big of a drawer-" she ignored him and pushed a couple of pieces of paper into his chest and handed him

some crayons. He chuckled and sat across from her. "What should I draw?"

"You and Joyce." she replied, concentrating on her picture. He raised an eyebrow.

"Why me and her?"

"Because you love each other." she replied. "Saw you two kiss under the toe thing."he was shocked at that, but then he laughed at her explanation.

"Mistletoe, El." he corrected her, chuckling. "So, you saw that, huh?" she nodded, smiling at him. The two sat in silence for a few minutes, swapping colors every once in a while. When Hopper was done, he held it up for her to see. He drew two people, not really stick figures, but not very detailed at the same time, standing on a hill with a sun in the corner. She gasped at the words he'd written on it. Will you be mine?

"Does that mean boyfriend and girlfriend?" El asked. He smiled and nodded at her. She clapped excitedly, a wide smile on her face. She held up her picture. She'd drawn two stick figures and wrote their names underneath them, with a heart between them, and Merry Christmas Mike in big, red letters at the top, with different colored hearts all around it. He smiled at that.

"It looks good!" he complimented. "Mike will love it." she smiled at him widely. She put it down and looked at him.

"Can we build a snowman?" she asked. He chuckled and nodded.

11 11 11 11

"El wants me to buy MIke a striped shirt for Christmas." Hopper told Joyce with a sigh. Joyce chuckled.

"She's such a sweetie. That boy and his striped shirts, I tell you."

"I've literally never seen him in anything other than a striped shirt. I might get him one of those and a regular T-shirt or something, Jeez."

"At least he doesn't wear striped shirts and striped pants."

"God, don't say that too loud and that's what we'll see at that silly Christmas party tonight." she smacked his shoulder.

"It's not silly, Jim." she scolded. "The Wheeler's throw one every Christmas Eve, and I know it'll be a lot more fun without Ted's sorry ass there."

"Speaking of that fucker," Hopper caught sight of striped shirts and headed that way, still speaking. "Can you believe he left on a business trip not even a full two days before Christmas."

"Business trip." Joyce said, rolling her eyes. He raised and eyebrow at her. "Karen has told me some… things, and we don't think every business trip he goes on is an actual… business trip, you know?"

"Huh, that wouldn't surprise me honestly. I remember how he used to be in high school. The only good he ever did for Karen was those kids, and that's a fact." Joyce nodded in agreement. He pointed at a shirt. "Think he'll like that?" he asked. Joyce nodded and looked through the hangers and found the right size.

"This is the smallest size they have in this so… he'll grow into it." she handed it to Hopper, who snorted.

"You'd think Karen never fed the little shit with how skinny he is."

"Lord I know, it worries me sometimes. I think it's because he's growing so much, though." Hopper nodded in agreement.

"Oh, do you think he'd wear a hat?" Hopper pointed at a row of beanies. "Because if he doesn't do something to that hair he needs to wear a hat."

11 11 11 11

"I just wanted to tell you kids that we aren't having our usual party this year." Karen told them as she stirred a pot of macaroni and cheese.

"Then why are you cooking?" Mike asked, making a face.

"We're not having the family over this year." she explained. "Just your friends and their families and I asked the Hollands but they've gone on a trip this year." Nancy bit her lip at the mention of them and nodded.

"Understandable." she said.

"But I there's just one condition." Karen said with a grin.

"What?"

"You and your friends are gonna have to sing for us." she said, smiling a devious little smile. Mike groaned.

"Ugh, why?"

"Because you four haven't sung since you were eleven..." he raised an eyebrow. "No pun intended." he snorted at that and Nancy couldn't control her giggles.

"I don't know, mom. I'll have to talk to them about it." he said, biting his lip.

"At least one song, Mikey. Please?" he sighed.

"Fine, but only one song! Can they come over? Because we would have to practice you know." he said, giving her a look. She sighed, a small smile on her lips, and nodded. He got up and ran to the phone to call them. Lucas came right over considering he lived the closest, and Will and Dustin showed up at the same time.

"So we're singing together for the first time in three years, huh?" Dustin asked, wiggling his eyebrows. Mike rolled his eyes but nodded.

"Nancy can play the piano!" Karen called.

"What?" Nancy exclaimed. She looked at the four boys, who gave her the puppy dog eyes. "Ugh, I hate you guys. Hurry up and figure out what you're gonna sing so I can practice a little."

"Nah, you love us." Will said, grinning. She rolled her eyes.

"How about Away in a manger?" Lucas suggested.

"I don't know, I kinda wanna do Santa Claus is Coming to Town." Dustin said.

"Yeah, that's Holly's favorite song." Mike said.

"El likes Go Tell It On The Mountain." Will said. The three looked at him.

"How do you know?"

"Any time she comes over she makes me play it." he responded, shrugging.

"Well, I'm guessing Mike's gonna wanna sing that one so we might as well." Lucas said.

"Oh shut it, ass wipe."

"Why don't you just sing both songs? I mean come on, the songs aren't that long, and I know for a fact none of you have stage fright." Nancy said, giving them a look.

"Yeah but our voices have changed." Mike said.

"I, for one, have a great singing voice, especially now." Lucas said, grinning.

"I'm better, trust me." Dustin said, giving Lucas a little poke. Lucas just rolled his eyes.

"I'm okay." Will said. "Not the best, but I'm pretty good if I do say so myself."

"I don't really sing anymore so I don't know, honestly." Mike said, shrugging.

"Why don't you sing something now then?" Karen suggested.

"Yeah, I'd rather not."

"Oh come on, Mike! Don't be such a-" Lucas started to say but caught

himself, looking like a deer caught in headlights when he saw the look Mike gave him.

"I'll sing with you, Mikey." Nancy said, nudging him in the side. He groaned. "You're gonna have to sing anyways, idiot, if we're gonna practice."

"Nancy, be nice to your brother." Karen called. Mike stuck his tongue out at Nancy and she rolled her eyes.

"What are you, twelve?"

"No, I'm thirteen."

"Shut up."

11 11 11 11

The boys only stayed for about an hour, having decided to just do Away in a Manger as Will had suggested. They would definitely have stayed until tonight but their parents were forcing them to dress up- which Mike was not looking forward to because he knew his mom would want to take hundreds of pictures. Especially when she forced him into a nice outfit and made him do Holly's pigtails while she continued cookie, or baking now. Nancy was too busy doing her makeup.

"Merry Christmas Eve!" Holly screeched when Dustin and his mom walked in.

"Awe, Merry Christmas Eve, Holly! I hope you're having a jolly time!" Claudia joked, hugging the smaller girl. Dustin ruffled her hair and she glared at him.

"You messed up my hair. Mikey!" she yelled. Mike came in from the kitchen, wearing black dress pants and a burgundy, long sleeved dress shirt.

"What's up?" he asked. She pointed up at Dustin.

"He messed up my hair. Beat him up."

"Holly, do you see these noodle arms? I couldn't beat him up if I tried." she giggled at that and ran off to get the hair brush for him.

"I hope you know I'm gonna start calling you Noodle now." Dustin told him. Mike gave him the stink eye.

"I hate you. Where's everyone else?" he asked.

"Lucas is taking forever to get ready, you know him, takes freaking two or three hour showers. He wants to smell extra good for Max, according to what he told me." Mike snorted.

"Wow."

"Yeah, and Steve is on the way to pick Max up, and I think Will, Jonathan and Mrs. Byers are on the way."

"Here Mikey!" Holly handed him the brush and he sighed, giving Dustin a look. Dustin snickered. MIke fixed her hair quickly and sent her on her way, and the two went down in the basement. "So, how much shit have you had to put up with so far today?"

"Nothing too bad, actually." Mike said, plopping down on the couch. "Mom hasn't asked me to do anything, other than try and keep Holly entertained, which was going fine until you and your mom showed up."

"Hey! It's not my fault your little sister has a crush on me." Mike laughed at that. And he laughed hard.

"What's so funny?" Lucas asked, bounding down the stairs.

"All I said is that Holly as a crush on me." Dustin said, clueless as ever. Lucas snorted.

"Nah, man, she doesn't have a crush on you."

"She's in love with Will." Mike said, snorting afterwards.

"Hmf." Dustin crossed his arms and pouted.

"Anyways, what were you guys talking about?" Lucas asked. "Before

Dustin thought Holly had a crush on him."

"He asked me how crazy it was here, basically." Mike told him, and went on to tell him that his mom wasn't making him do anything other than entertain Holly.

"Mike, your sister is hiding from me again." Will said, hopping down the stairs two at a time. Mike started laughing again and Dustin pouted, so Lucas took it upon himself to explain to Will what was going on.

11 11 11 11

"Well, don't you look spiffy." Steve said, opening the passenger door for Max, who rolled her eyes. She was wearing a red, long sleeved button up shirt and dark pants. Her hair was in a side braid, and she had the smallest hint of mascara and lip gloss. He snorted and shut the door, and grabbed the presents her mom was holding.

"You've got a little something in here too." Mrs. Hargrove told him.

"Well thank ya! You didn't have to do that."

"It's not a problem. Your gift to me is keeping her safe." He grinned at her and gave her a side hug, and then put the presents in the back seat and waved as he got in the drivers side. He drove off. "You do look nice though." he told her, nudging her arm. She chuckled.

"Thanks. You look like an idiot. What's with the bow tie?" she asked. He scoffed.

"How dare you." He said, dramatically, putting a hand over his heart. "I honestly just wore it so my mom would shut the hell up. She acts like it's prom or something. Not sure why she's making a big deal out of it, she usually doesn't care and isn't home." he shrugged. She laughed. "I'm gonna take it off before we go inside, remind me to." She nodded.

"I'll probably take my hair down too. Maybe get El to redo it."

"Why?"

"Blame Mike, actually."

"Of course."

"He taught her how to braid hair, and she insists on braiding mine whenever we're together. I don't mind though, she gets better at it each time."

"The girl's smart, she'll be ready for school by next year."

"God, I hope so. Mike whines constantly about not being able to see her everyday." Steve snorted.

"And you don't whine when you don't see Lucas?"

"Uh, no?"

"Sure." she smacked his arm and he just grinned.

"So… your mom is never home?" Max asked a couple minutes later. He shrugged.

"Neither of my parents are, actually. They go on a lot of business trips. Why do you think I used to throw so many parties and never get caught?"

"I didn't know you during that time, King Steve."

"Right, I'm so used to you at this point I keep forgetting you haven't been here long." she snorted, flipping him off. "Rude. Why do you ask though?"

"You mentioned that she isn't home a few minutes ago." she replied.

"Oh, yeah, I did, didn't I?" she nodded. "Huh."

They didn't talk anymore until they got to the Wheeler's.

11 11 11 11

"El, come on, Mike will think you look great in a potato sack dress." Hopper called. The kid's been in her room for the last hour, trying on different dresses. She poked her head out and glared, then made a

face.

"Potato sack dress?"

"I'll explain it in the car, come on, you don't want to be late, do you?" he asked. She sighed.

"Okay." she disappeared into her room again and came back out five minutes later. She was wearing a long sleeved, ankle length burgundy dress that had a dark green belt around her waist, and green flats to match. She wore a black head band, keeping most of her curls out of her face.

"You look great, El." Hopper told her. She smiled at him and grabbed her coat. "Go on and get in the truck, I'll grab the presents." he told her. She nodded and skipped out of the cabin.

By the time they were on the main road, she'd managed to find the best radio channel for Christmas songs, and was singing along to one of the ones she knew.

"You've got a nice voice there, kid." Hopper told her, and she beamed at him.

"Thank you. Mike is singing today." she said, smiling. He raised an eyebrow.

"He is?" she nodded.

"Yes, with Dustin, Lucas and Will. Mike told me on the supercom."

"Oh, okay."

"Mrs. Wheeler wanted them to sing."

"I figured." he chuckled. "I doubt they'd do it on their own."

"Why?" he shrugged.

"They just don't seem like the type to do that sort of thing." she looked at him and blinked. She shrugged and went back to singing. He chuckled, resisting the urge to ruffle her hair, because he knew

damn well she'd make him turn around and go back home so she could fix it.

"Are you giving Joyce the drawing?" she asked him. He glanced at her and nodded.

"Yep, I put it in an envelope and everything." he told her. She giggled quietly at that.

They were the last to arrive, meaning everyone was in the kitchen and living room, parents talking and Will chasing Dustin around the dining room table. Mike was standing next to Mr. Sinclair, talking to him, holding Holly with both arms. She'd insisted on him holding her, just so she could play in his hair. She was the first to spot El, and when she did, she shrieked right in Mike's ear.

"EL!" Mike almost dropped her, almost, but he did put her down and put his hand over his left ear, grimacing.

"Jesus Christ, Holly, can you get any loud-" he shut up when he saw El, and his jaw dropped.

"You're gonna catch a fly, Wheeler." Hopper told him, nudging him in the shoulder as he walked past him and into the kitchen to talk to Joyce. Mike blushed and grinned at El as he walked over to her. She immediately wrapped her arms around him and he hugged her back.

"You look amazing, El." he whispered. She grinned back at him.

"Ooh! Mikey's in trouble!" Holly said, giggling as she pointed up. Mike looked up and his cheeks turned an even darker shade of red. Of course, there just had to be mistletoe every damn where in the house. The boys started giggling and Max raised her eyebrows at him. El grinned at him mischievously, as if she knew something he didn't.

"You little sneak." he mumbled but kissed her. It only lasted a couple seconds, but his face was as red as Santa's hat when he pulled away. There'd been a flash, meaning either Jonathan or his mom took a picture. Mike grabbed her hand and pulled her into the living room, looking down at the floor as he did so.

"You guys are so childish." Nancy said, rolling her eyes at the boys.

"Yeah, shitheads, wait until you fall in love with a girl."Steve mocked, which resulted in getting smacked right in the face with a plastic ornament. "I deserved that." Mike glared at him.

"Oh my goodness, you two match! Did you plan that?" Mrs. Sinclair asked. Mike looked at El's dress and she looked at his shirt. Mike snorted.

"We didn't, actually." He said.

"What a coinkydink then!" Claudia said, and then laughed when Dustin started grumbling about her saying coinky dink.

"Who even says that?" he muttered.

"You literally said that a few minutes ago, hypocrite." Will said, raising an eyebrow at him

"Bite me, Byers." Will snorted.

"Please, please keep Holly entertained for me. She is driving me nuts in the kitchen." Karen told Mike. He snorted and nodded.

"Will do, mom." he told her. Walking back in the living room, he announced, "Alrighty, all the children sit down and we'll sing Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer!"

"There are only two children, Mike." Dustin said, raising an eyebrow.

"I'm talking about you too, Henderson. Get your ass on the floor." Dustin scowled at him. Mike turned to Steve, Max, and Lucas. "You three too."

"Wheeler!" Hopper barked, laughing. Mike snorted.

"Just because you're the oldest out of all of us doesn't mean we're children." Lucas said, rolling his eyes. They did sit down though, around the Christmas tree, where Holly and Erica were sitting. Hopper and Mr. Sinclair sat on the couch with El and Nancy, and Mike sat in the recliner. His mom, Joyce, Mrs. Sinclair, and Claudia were in the kitchen, talking to Jonathan, who was helping them cook.

"Anyone wanna start? Holly, you remember the names?" he asked. She looked up at him.

"Uh, kinda? Help me?" she asked sweetly. He smiled and nodded.

"You know Dasher and Dancer," he looked at her and she continued.

"And Prancer and Vixen, Comet and Cupid, And Donner and..."

"Blitzen." he sang. "But do you recall, the most famous reindeer of all?"

After that, everyone who remembered the lyrics sang along, while Holly giggled and danced with El. Jonathan had obviously left the kitchen to record every bit, upon the request by Karen. After about ten more minutes of Mike naming songs and everyone singing along, Karen announced that dinner was ready.

Almost everyone managed to squeeze into the table, having more than enough room for plates and cups because all of the food was in the kitchen instead of all over the table. Hopper, Mr. Sinclair, Jonathan and Steve stood while they ate, letting everyone else sit at the table

"What are these?" El asked Mike from her seat next to him. She held up her fork.

"String beans. They're better than peas, I promise." he told her. She made a face at them, but tried them. She made another face and said,

"Not much." he chuckled.

"I don't like them either, but mom makes me eat them anyways." she gave him a smile and ate the rest of them before eating the rest of her food. Everyone made small talk, and Lucas and Max were playing footsies under the table, which Will silently found hilarious. He was seated between Max and Holly, who would not, for the life of him, look his way.

"Holly!" he sang quietly, trying to get her attention. She wouldn't look at him. Karen raised an eyebrow at him. "Cat got your tongue, Holls?" he asked. She, in turn, looked at him and stuck her tongue out at

him, before giggling. He chuckled.

"Told you." Mike told Dustin, who sat on his other side. Dustin glared at him and then began explaining to El how good figgy pudding was.

"What is figgy?" El asked Mike.

"It's a fruit." he explained. "It's really called a fig, but people say figgy pudding. I don't know why."

"Like a nickname?"

"I guess so, yeah."

"Can I call you a nickname?" he raised an eyebrow and nodded, taking a sip of his water. "Beans." he choked on his water.

"Beans? Why beans?" he asked, and Hopper, who had overheard their conversation, started laughing.

"Because you're a beanpole." she said, shrugging innocently. "Dad called you that last night." Mike turned and looked at Hopper, who just raised his eyebrows as he drank his drink.

"I don't know what she's talking about, Beans." El giggled and Mike huffed playfully, pouting.

"Does that mean we can call you that too, Mike?" Max asked, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Nope." he said, popping the P. "Mike is just fine."

"You're no fun." she said, rolling her eyes. Mike shrugged.

"Only El can call me Beans, now. Hop can stick to Beanpole if he wants." Hopper laughed again and went in the kitchen.

"We can call him Noodle." Dustin told the rest of the party. "He said he had noodle arms earlier, therefore, he is Noodle Mike."

"Shut up, Dustin."

11 11 11 11

"Michael! I swear, if you give yourself a concussion, I will beat your ass!" Karen called as he chased Holly down the hall. Mike laughed, finally catching a giggling Holly and carrying her back in the living room, where everyone was waiting on him.

"Jesus, Holly, you're getting heavy."

"No, it's just your noodle arms, Noodle." Dustin told him. Mike glared at him, putting Holly on the floor and promptly grabbing a pillow and whacking him in the face with it.

"Shut your face, Dusty." Mike mocked, dancing away from Dustin's hands as he tried to smack him. He sat on the other side of Lucas, who rolled his eyes at the two.

"Okay, shitheads, do your thing." Steve told them. The four teens glared at him and he snickered.

"We're singing Away in a Manger because this is El's first Christmas, and her favorite Christmas song." Mike said, cheeks turning pink when he saw Dustin and Lucas give each other a look. He glared at them. He sighed and counted to four and they started singing.

"That was good music." El told him once it was over, planting a kiss on his lips. Dustin snickered at the face Mike made when she pulled away, his face redder than ever.

"So, presents now, yeah?" Mrs. Sinclair asked. The teens nodded, eager to open and give presents.

Everyone swapped presents, mainly just clothes from the parents, and the kids had done secret Santa for the most part, but made an exception for El and Mike. Will got new crayons from Max, Max got stickers to put on her skateboard from Dustin, as well as a couple wristbands from Lucas that had various quotes or sayings on them, Dustin got candy from Lucas, and Lucas got a new action figure from Will. Mike decided to wait and give El her necklace later, before she leaves, but she did give him hers, along with the beanie from Hopper.

"You do know she's probably gonna steal it right back at some point?" Jonathan asked him, nudging him. "Nancy does the same thing."

"That explains a lot." he muttered, but grinned at El in thanks. "I don't care, I like it." he put the beanie on, hardly taming his curls, and thanked Hopper.

"That didn't work out like I thought it would." Hopper told Joyce, who laughed.

"So, this was Hoppers idea, but, us older teenagers, me, Nancy, and Jonathan, pitched in and helped with the costs." Steve said, handing each of them a small box. They opened them and revealed dog tags. "One has your name and birthday, and the other has your saying, friends don't lie and your D and D name. Like, Mike's says Paladin, El is Mage, Max is Zoomer, and so on." he explained. The boys grinned and put theirs on automatically, thanking them. Meanwhile, El hugged the four while Max just high fived or fist bumped them, and then put theirs on.

11 11 11 11

A little while later, Max and Mike were coming back from getting drinks when they saw Hopper and Joyce kissing under the mistletoe.

"It's about damn time!" Max hollered, whooping and running into the living room. Mike stared, wide eyed for a second as the two adults looked at him sheepishly. He pointed at them accusingly.

"Not in front of the children!" And joined everyone else in the living room.

A couple hours later, once wrapping paper that had once covered the entire floor was cleaned up, and as was the kitchen, to-go plates made and ready to go, everyone left, Hopper and El being the last to leave as usual. Mike pulled El up to his room while Hopper talked to Karen.

"You put my picture up!" she said excitedly, sitting on his bed. she'd given it to him not long after everyone finished opening presents, and he almost immediately went and put it up in his room. He smiled and nodded, opening the top of his drawer and pulling out the wrapped box. He sat across from her and handed it to her.

"I wanted to wait until everyone else left." she smiled at him and nodded, tearing the paper off it. She fumbled with the box a little and opened it, her eyes widening immediately. "Um, my mom helped me pick it out but I bought it." he said. "It's one of the first things I taught you and it means a lot to me. I understand if you don't like it, I can take it back or-" she interrupted him with a quick kiss and holding the unclasped chain to him.

"Put it on for me?" she asked sweetly. He blushed and nodded, taking it from her. He made sure the word was facing the right way and put it on. She turned back around and scooted closer to him, hugging him. "It means a lot to me too. Love it, Beans." he chuckled and hugged her back.

"I'm gonna figure out a nickname, other than El, for you soon. I promise." she let him go and he winked at her. She giggled.

"El! Let's go before the snow starts again!" Hopper yelled. She rolled her eyes and stood, pulling Mike with her.

"Oh! First I want to take a picture of the three of you! El, I love the necklace on you! It's so pretty." Karen said, grabbing her camera. Mike noticed Hopper's barely there eye roll at the mention of pictures and he nudged him.

"I hate pictures too." Hopper snorted and nodded.

"Same, kid. Nice choice of necklace, I don't think she'll ever take it off." Mike smiled, wrapping an arm around her waist as Hopper put his hands on each of their shoulders and smiled for the camera.

8. Chapter 7

Damn it wasn't even a whole month since the last time I updated, who am I and what have I done with B? Anyways, the season 3 trailer is out. I freaked out for a LONG time, made my own theories. Y'all comment some theories you have if you want to lmao.

Also, thank the trailer for this because if I hadn't got any content it probably would've been another two months before this came out.

Saturday, January 19, 1985

El was sure to tell Mike that she was wearing her necklace, and always made sure to have Hopper tell him when he talked to him and she couldn't. The couple haven't seen each other in two weeks, the father and daughter having gotten snowed in at the cabin- Hopper and Karen wouldn't let Mike *attempt* to ride his bike or walk to see her- and by the time Hopper dug a path out, she was sick with a bad cold, losing her voice along with it.

He had talked to El multiple times over the phone before she lost her voice, as well as Hopper, who kept him updated on how she was doing. Mike had been a cranky little asshole, according to Nancy, the whole two weeks, but today would change that. Most of the snow had melted, as it'd gotten a little warmer and the sun was shining, though it'd probably snow again before spring arrived.

Mike, for the record, had a good reason to be a cranky little asshole. He couldn't see his girlfriend, he couldn't be with her while she was sick, and his nightmares have been going ape shit. Thankfully, as of late, he can't remember them, he just knows they're terrifying and wake him up all through the night, so he's tired. Cut him some slack!

"Michael!" Karen yelled, multiple times, before her thirteen year old, overly dramatic son trudged his way downstairs, where she and his sisters were waiting. Ted has yet to come back from his *business trip*.

"What?" he grumbled, plopping down on the couch.

"While you were up there moping about not seeing your girlfriend, Hopper called." Nancy said. Mike perked up, then glared at her. And immediately got worried.

"Just Hopper? Is El okay?" he asked.

"She's fine, Mike." Nancy said, patting his shoulder. "He said that if you promised to stop being a cranky little asshole, he'd bring her over today, *and* pick up the rest of your little nerd friends, sans Lucas at least. His scrawny ass can walk over here himself." Mike perked up again but narrowed his eyes at her at the insults.

"Well you're being an almost legal adult cranky asshole." He retorted and stuck his tongue out at her. Nancy just rolled her eyes. "But I promise," he muttered. "Is that all you wanted? Because if so, I plan to go back upstairs and mope until she gets here." Karen couldn't help but snort at that and shake her head at him. She flicked a curl out of his face.

"No, that's not all. You two sit on either side of him, okay?" she said, and Nancy plopped down to his left and Holly to his right. "Do you remember when I told you on Christmas that I had another present for you? But we had to wait for it to be finished?" the three nodded, but then Holly shook her head.

"I kind of forgot." she said, giggling when Mike poked her in the side. Karen smiled.

"Well, a friend of mine got it for me yesterday and held it until this morning. It's in the garage, but I'll bring it to you." she left without another word and the three siblings looked at each other.

"Do you think it's a little pig?" Holly asked. Mike and Nancy looked at each other and tried to hold back their laughter.

"I'm not sure, Hols, do you *want* a pig?" Mike asked her. She shrugged.

"They're cute when they're babies but then they get ugly. I want one of the ones that stay little." Mike snorted and Nancy pinched his arm.

"Maybe one day, Holly." Nancy told her and Holly just smiled widely and nodded.

"Okay, all three of you close your eyes and Mike, hold out your hands." Karen called, hiding behind the wall coming into the living room.

"Why me?" Mike made a face but did as he was told.

"Because you're sitting in the middle." she replied, her voice noticeably closer. He felt the weight of whatever it was and then froze as it started moving.

"Mom." he said, not opening his eyes. She laughed. "Mom, you didn't."

"Open your eyes and see." he could tell by the excited scream that Holly opened her eyes first, and then the awing coming from Nancy. He opened one eye and looked at the puppy as it squirmed, licking at his face. He opened both eyes and laughed, tilting his head back and holding the puppy, which was a girl, a bit further away so she couldn't reach his face. "I figured that since your father never wanted animals, that we could get one now that he's hardly ever home anymore."

"Was this just to spite him or did you actually want a dog?" Nancy asked as Mike held the puppy with one arm and scratched behind her ears, smiling as Holly giggled when the puppy licked her hand.

"A little bit of both, actually." she said sheepishly. "But I don't care what he thinks. It's not like he's gonna have to clean up after her- he wouldn't do it to begin with. I've always wanted a dog, since I was a little girl, but you know how grandpa was allergic so we couldn't get one. And I never lived on my own long enough to get one." Nancy nodded.

"Does she have a name or do we get to name her?" Mike asked.

"You get to name her."

"You three come up with it then, I'm not good with names."

"You technically named El, you know." Nancy said, looking at him

pointedly. He furrowed his eyebrows.

"Not really. All I did was take the El from eleven. It's literally two letters." she snorted and shrugged.

"I like Rosie." Holly said, looking at them.

"Where'd you get that name from?" Karen asked. She shrugged.

"Roses are pretty, and she's pretty." she explained. The three looked at each other and laughed.

"Rosie it is, then." Mike stated, and handed her to Nancy and hopped up. "I'm going to go tell the guys and Max." he said and ran to the basement, where his Supercom was. "Guys, are you there? Over."

"I'm here. Over." Dustin's voice rang. The other three followed soon after.

"What is it, Wheeler?" Max asked. "...Over."

"I got a *puppy*."

Almost immediately after their call ended, Lucas ran over (he loved puppies for some reason) and almost squealed when he saw her.

"You better be glad your girlfriend wasn't here to hear that." Nancy told him, an eyebrow raised. He flipped her off and she laughed.

"The others are coming too, right?" Karen asked Mike. He nodded.

"Yeah, Hop's picking them up." he replied, sitting on the couch and watching Rosie attack Lucas' face while he laughed. In the time Mike had called his friends over the Supercom, Holly had fallen asleep for her nap, so she was up in her room.

Twenty minutes later, there was a honking from outside, and the second Mike opened the door, his face was full of dark curls and he almost fell over.

"Mike!" she shrieked. He barely managed to catch her, but did and

laughed, hugging her back. "I missed you."

"I missed you too." he kissed the top of her head. Max pretended to gag and promptly walked into the house to find Lucas, whereas she started laughing at his predicament, and Will and Dustin joined in on the laughter. Rosie decided she wanted to sit, and sat on his head. Mike looked at El, who was staring at the puppy with interest. "Have you ever seen a dog before?" he asked. She looked at him, eyebrows furrowed.

"Demo...dog?"

"No, no, she's not at all like them, promise." he told her, and lead her into the living room. He sat them on the floor a few feet away from the others and said, "She's sweet. She might bite you but it wouldn't hurt you, she doesn't know any better." he let out a low whistle and Rosie let out a tiny noise and ran to him, licking and biting at his hand. He snorted and picked her up, holding her out to El. "Here, she won't hurt you. I promise." she hesitated for a split second, but then took her, and jumped when Rosie licked her hand. Mike laughed and she giggled, petting Rosie's back.

"What's her name?" Will asked.

"Rosie." Mike replied.

"You named your dog Rosie?" Dustin asked, snorting.

"Okay first off, you named your turtle Yertle." Mike said.

"Eh, true."

"Is there a second?" Max asked, an eyebrow raised.

"Second, Holly named her."

"Why'd she choose Rosie?" Lucas asked. He shrugged.

"She just said because roses are pretty, and that Rosie was pretty, so..."

"That might be my fault." Will said, making a face. "She asked me to

draw her a picture to color the last time I came over, and I drew a bunch of roses. She wondered why and I said that they were pretty." Mike full on laughed and said after a couple seconds,

"I don't know how much longer you're gonna deny it, but Holly has a *serious* crush on you, dude."

Monday, February 11, 1985

Mike was falling. It was the quarry all over again, but this time, El wasn't there to save him. She was *gone* because of *him.* He let them take her. He was screaming, terrified screams as he fell through the air. He thought heard Dustin screaming his name, but all he could actually hear was the blood rushing to his head and the wind.

"Mike! Wake up!"

He sat up so fast he knocked foreheads with Nancy, who had shaken him awake.

"Fuck." she muttered quietly, hand on her forehead. "Note to self, don't wake him up like that again." she put her hands on his shoulders and made him look at her. "Hey, Mikey it's okay. It was just a dream." he brought his knees up to his chest and made grabby hands for her, and she hugged him tightly. He was breathing hard, letting out small whimpers as he tried to calm down. She rocked back and forth a little and ran a hand through his hair. "It's okay." eventually, the whimpers turned into sniffles, so she asked, "Do you wanna talk about it?" he started to shake his head but stopped and nodded. He cleared his throat a little.

"I was falling." he said quietly. "The quarry thing happened again but... El wasn't there because... because I *let* the lab get her and I was going to die. I *know* it wasn't real and that she's fine but..."

"It's scary." she finished. He nodded and wiped at his eyes, sniffing. She squeezed his shoulder gently and looked at the clock. Three o'clock. "We have a couple more hours until we have to get up, do you want me to stay with you?"

"Um... You don't have to." she took that as a yes and stood, pulling back the blankets some and nudging him until he scooted over enough. She laid back and put her arm across his pillow.

"Lay back." she told him softly. He did as he was told and laid down and she wrapped her arms around him. He curled up a little, pulling the blankets over them. He jumped when he felt something down at his feet, "It's just Rosie." he nodded. Rosie curled up at the end of his bed. It was a couple minutes of Nancy playing with his hair that he fell asleep, and he didn't make another sound that night.

Despite having fallen asleep pretty easily and not having anymore dreams after the first, Mike was still tired and ready to go back to bed, but he sucked it up and went downstairs for breakfast.

"You okay, Mike?" Karen asked, ruffling his hair. He nodded, taking a bite out of his toast. Rosie hopped her way over to him and nuzzled his leg. He grinned slightly and scratched her behind the ears.

"Yeah, just couldn't sleep much." he shrugged. Nancy gave him a look and he looked back at her, widening his eyes as if saying *don't you dare*.

"Something on your mind?" Karen asked. Mike glanced at his dad, who was reading the paper in his recliner.

"Not particularly." he looked back at his mom and she nodded in understanding. He hated lying to her, but his asshole of a dad *was* on his mind, and not in a good way. He kicked Rosie a couple nights ago when she wouldn't leave him alone and Mike threw a cup of water at him for it, so now he was grounded. At least, while his dad was around he was.

"Well... if you need to talk you can always come to me, okay?" Karen told him. He nodded and gave her a smile. She walked by him to take a sleepy Holly her juice and ruffled his hair again, making it stick up all over the place.

"Mom!" he whined, patting his hair back down in an attempt to tame it. She chuckled.

"Well, you two better get going or you'll be late." she told them. They both groaned but got their stuff and left in Nancy's car after saying their goodbyes.

"So, are we gonna talk about it?"

"About what?" he asked.

"Don't give me that shit. What was that last night?"

"Just a bad dream, Nance. That's all it was. I told you that last night."

"Yeah, but why didn't you tell mom about it?"

"She worries too much, Nancy." he huffed, crossing his arms.

"Alright, you little turd, after school we're gonna make hot chocolate and sit in the basement and talk, okay?" he raised an eyebrow at her.

"Talk about what, exactly? The dream?" she shook her head.

"No, neither of us have shared everything that happened, either time, so that's what we're gonna do. Maybe that'll help. Plus, we're gonna talk about what you're gonna do for El for Valentine's day." Mike gasped.

"That's this week!" he exclaimed.

"It sure is! Better start thinking about what you wanna do-"

"No, I know what I'm gonna do, I need to talk to Hopper about it first though." she raised an eyebrow at him.

"Okay then," she stopped in the parking lot at the middle school. "Okay, go on. I'll see you later?" he nodded.

"I'm going to the station after school though. Bye!" he jumped out of the car and jogged over to the rest of his friends. Dustin started laughing. "What?"

"And you guys thought *I* had bad hair at the snowball? Your head actually looks like a damn birds nest." Mike rolled his eyes and

flipped him off.

"Oh come on, it's nowhere near as bad as yours was, Dustin." Will rolled his eyes. "But what happened though, seriously?" Mike huffed in annoyance and crossed his arms.

"Mom." was his answer.

"Figures. C'mere, Wheeler." Max said. He took a couple steps forward and she started attempting to flatten his hair down a little. "God, when did you start turning into Dustin? Fucking curly ass hair." Mike jumped back a little in surprise at her choice of words. She made a face as Lucas and Dustin started giggling. Max snickered and Will raised his eyebrows. "What? It's not like *you* haven't said it before, Wheeler."

"Yeah, when I was a toddler and didn't know any better." he shook his head a little. "But I don't care, it just surprised me."

"Why? 'Cause I'm a girl?" she raised her eyebrows.

"Uh, no? Nancy said it this morning because I accidentally head butted her."

"You accidentally head butted your sister." Will deadpanned.

"How the hell did you do that?" Lucas asked. The bell rang and they started making their way inside.

"I'll explain at lunch." he said, breaking off from the group with Will in tow. He heard Lucas start grumbling about excuses but Mike didn't want to be late, so he just rolled his eyes and continued on his way, talking to Will about the supposed partner project they were starting today.

"What do you guys think's up with Mike?" Lucas asked. "He hasn't been acting right."

"This is Mike we're talking about, Lucas." Dustin said. "He hasn't acted right in over a year."

"True, but you'd think that since El is back he'd be different."

"He is different." Max said. "First, he's nice to me. Second, he's completely different around El than he is with us."

"That's my point, Max, he's not right with us! He used to joke around and shit but he doesn't really do that anymore."

"He does look like shit a lot." Dustin said, rubbing his chin. "He fell asleep in Social Studies this morning."

"That…" Lucas started. "Is not good."

"Like you two haven't fallen asleep in class before." Max rolled her eyes.

"Nope." They chorused.

"None of us have." Dustin said brightly. "We're nerds, Max, we're not the type to fall asleep in class."

"Good point. Carry on." she motioned for them to go on with the conversation.

"He probably hasn't been sleeping 'cause of his parents or something." Lucas said. "They've been fighting a lot, is what my mom told me."

"How does she know?" Dustin asked, cocking his head to the side.

"She stays up pretty late, she can hear them screaming at each other when they're in the kitchen." he replied.

"Damn." Max pushed her food around on her plate.

"He's probably worried about what he's gonna get El for Valentine's day." Dustin reasoned, hoping that was all it was.

"Holy shit Valentine's day is this week." Lucas muttered.

"Mhm. Did you forget, Stalker?" Max asked, raising an eyebrow. Lucas scoffed.

"Psh, no." he shook his head. She rolled her eyes and looked towards

the cafeteria doors for Mike and Will. As she did so, Lucas made an *oh shit* face at Dustin and he choked on his milk.

"You good?" Max asked, turning back around to face them. Lucas just shrugged and Dustin slapped his chest.

"I'm *great*." he managed. She made a face and started eating her own lunch. She jumped when Mike and Will finally sat down, making the loudest possible noise. Mike buried his face in his arms and she looked at the other two. Will just looked smug. Max kicked his knee lightly.

"What's wrong dude?" Lucas asked.

"I... am scarred for life." he said, muffled by his jacket.

"What happened?" Dustin asked.

"Will dropped his pencil last period."

"How did *that* scar you?"

"He said the *F* word when he did it."

"Oh my *God*." Max started laughing at him saying *the F word* instead of the actual word and Dustin choked again. Lucas snorted.

"I guess Will isn't as innocent as we thought he was."

"You guys won't hear me say it, that's for sure." Will said, shrugging. "I only said it to freak out Mike and it worked."

"You *ass*." Mike sat up, shaking his head, trying to get his hair out of his eyes.

"You need a haircut." Will said.

"No." Mike shook his head again. "Damn it." he pushed it away with his hand this time and grabbed his bagged lunch, dumping it's content on the table.

"Okay explain why you head butted Nancy this morning." Dustin said

after a minute or two.

"I was having a bad dream and she apparently heard me and tried to wake me up. I sat up and we knocked foreheads."

"Christ." Dustin rolled his eyes. "That's siblings abuse. Is that a thing?" he asked.

"I wish." Max scoffed, stabbing the straw into the milk carton. They were quiet so she looked up and saw them looking at their own food. "What?"

"Sorry I said that." Dustin mumbled.

"What, the siblings abuse thing?" he nodded. "Don't worry about it. He hasn't tried bothering me since I stabbed him in the neck. Like he hasn't even *looked* at me. And when Neil starts trying to yell at me Billy will do something to make him get yelled at instead."

"That's good." Will said.

"And shocking." Mike took a bite out of his sandwich.

"If he bothers you again, we'll get Mike to get Hopper to arrest him." Mike scowled at Lucas. "I mean, he is his father-in-law after all."

"Oh fuck off, Sinclair." Mike sighed. "I need a nap."

Even though he's done it a couple times before, Mike still felt weird going to the police station. He didn't even get a chance to speak to Flo, other than a quick smile and hello when she called,

"Hey Hop! Mr. Wheeler's here to see you!"

"He can come back!" Hopper called back.

"Go ahead, Sweetie." she nodded towards his office. He smiled at her and made his way to the office. Hopper was taking a sip of coffee when he walked in.

"Hey, Hop."

"Hey, kid. Sit down." Mike sat down and put his book bag on the ground next to him. "You come here right after school?"

"Yeah." Hopper chuckled. "What?"

"I've been wondering when you were gonna come and talk to me. Didn't think it'd be three days before Valentine's day." Mike blushed, shrugging.

"I kinda forgot that it was coming up. I need a nap." he muttered. "But I know what I want to get her, but I need your permission first."

"Jeez, kid, you sound like you're asking for permission to marry her or something." Mike's eyes widened and his face turned a bright red.

"N-no." he stuttered. "I, um, I want to get her a kitten."

"A kitten? She did tell you about what they did... there, right?" Mike nodded immediately.

"Yeah, *but* we went to Dustin's house last week and they have a cat, and she fell in love with it. Her, I think? I don't know. Anyways, she actually asked me if she could get one and I didn't know how to respond so I said maybe in the future."

"Okay. And where do you expect to get one?"

"One of my neighbors cat had kittens a couple weeks ago. She said that they'd be ready to adopt by Monday, as in today so... I asked her about it yesterday and she said they were already trained to use the litter box and everything and were eating solid food and ready to go. And they're free." It was obvious how nervous he was, and how much he wanted to do this for her. It didn't take much to convince Hopper to begin with, so he just laughed.

"Calm down, kid. You can get her a cat. Boy or girl?"

"Really?" Mike's eyes widened a little, a grin forming on his face. "I didn't expect you to go along with it." Hopper snorted. "Uh, probably a girl? I don't know, I asked mom about it and she said the boys spray too much or something." he shrugged.

"Yeah, I'd rather have a girl. Gonna get her fixed as soon as she's old enough though." Mike nodded. Hopper looked at his watch. "I get off at five, a little less than two hours. You wanna hang around here and do your homework or something? And then we can go buy stuff for the cat." Mike nodded enthusiastically.

"I was worried about that the most, other than whether or not you'd say no." he said, pulling his books out of his bag. "Finding time to go get it because tomorrow I have a project that me and Will need to work on at his house and that'll take forever so I'm staying over tomorrow night." he babbled. "And then Thursday is Valentine's day and I'm getting her flowers and candy too so today is like the only day I could go get stuff." Hopper chuckled. "What?"

"Nothing, it's just... there's no doubt in my mind that you're Karen's kid." Mike raised his eyebrows. "You sound just like her, worrying about everything. You're like a mix between her and Joyce."

"Wow." Mike deadpanned, then snickered, "I *do* sound like her. God, I need to chill." he shook his head at himself and sat Indian style in the chair, just barely able to with his long legs, and a peaceful silence fell over them, the only sound being Mike flipping a page over or the scribble of his pencil. After a few minutes, Hopper asked,

"Speaking of your mom, does she know you're here?" Mike nodded, eyes trained on a math problem.

"Yeah, I called her after school. She was cool with it." Hopper snorted and nodded, even though Mike hadn't paid any attention to the movement.

Within an hour, he was done with his homework and had packed everything up, looking around the room. He'd taken his jacket off and was wearing the sweater they'd gotten him.

"You like the sweater, kid?" Mike looked at him and nodded.

"Yeah, it's comfortable. I usually wear the hat too but I was rushing this morning and forgot it."

"Really?" Hopper asked. He nodded again.

"I wear the dog chains too." he pulled them out of his shirt and showed it to him. Hopper grinned.

"Well... good, kid, that's good." Mike was quiet for a couple minutes and Hopper looked up, seeing that Mike had a tiny grin on his face. "What?"

"So... you and Mrs. Byers?" he asked. Hopper blinked at him and Mike wiggled his eyebrows. Hopper started laughing. Mike grinned wider. He hadn't said anything to him about it, even though it's been about a month and a half since he and Max caught them kissing. "What?"

"Sorry, I just thought about what you said when you caught us kissing. *Not in front of the children.*" Mike snickered. "And I'm surprised you've waited this long to ask about it. The redhead," Mike snorted at that, Hopper rarely ever called her by her name, "asked almost immediately after. But, if you must know, we are... kind of dating."

"Kind of dating?"

"I mean... I guess you could say were together."

"Like boyfriend and girlfriend?" Hopper nodded. "Who asked, you or her?"

"What's it to you, kid?"

"Just wondering." Mike shrugged.

"Joyce." he mumbled. Mike snickered and Hopper glared at him playfully. "Hey! You shouldn't be laughing, you turd, I already know that it was El who asked you!"

"That's *why* I'm laughing." Mike said, grinning. "El told me that Mrs. Byers is the one who told her that girls could ask boys too, and not just the other way around. She'd asked me why Mrs. Byers wouldn't ask you but I didn't know what to tell her." Hopper snorted.

"When *was* this?"

"Christmas Eve." he replied.

"Figured." Hopper shook his head, shrugging. "Okay kid, since you're so keen on keeping yourself occupied by asking about my love life, I'm gonna put you to work." Mike snickered and nodded. "Do you have decent handwriting?"

"Eh, you can read it so I guess." Hopper nodded.

"Good enough, come on." he stood up and let Mike out to the front, where Flo was sitting, typing away. "Hey Flo? I'm putting him to work since he's being a nosy turd." Mike grinned at her and she chuckled. "He's got decent handwriting so feel free to let him write stuff."

"Gotcha, Hop. Alrighty, Mr. Wheeler, you see that calendar over there?" she nodded towards the one close to the door. He nodded. "Grab it and come over here." she brought a stool out from under the desk and placed it next to her. He came over with it and set it down on an empty space. She handed him a piece of paper with a bunch of dates on it. "I've been meaning to do this since the first of January but I obviously haven't. I want you to write all those dates down for me, starting with whatever comes after today." Mike nodded and got to work, writing down the little notes and schedules or off days for Hopper.

9. Chapter 8

By the time five rolled around, and Hopper emerged from his office, Mike had finished the calendar and was now stapling papers with a look of pure determination on his face. Hopper leaned against the desk and raised an eyebrow at Flo, who chuckled.

"He's a hard worker, I'll tell you that. He's got twice as many papers stapled together in the last hour than I would in three." Hopper snickered. "Thinkin' about keeping him around to help out."

"I will." Mike said, stapling the last two pieces together. He looked at them and shrugged. "If I don't annoy you too much, that is."

"You haven't annoyed me at all, Sweetie." Flo waved her hand at him. "Next time you come in I think I'll have you cleaning." he grinned at her and nodded.

"You got all your stuff packed up, kid?" Hopper asked. Mike nodded and grabbed his book bag from the floor and stood up.

"If you really do need some help, me and the other guys will help. Just let us know." Mike told Flo, who thanked him as they left. As the got in the truck, Hopper looked at Mike, who was looking around outside. He chuckled and started the truck, pulling out of the parking lot.

"What?" Mike asked.

"I don't know, kid. You know, usually a parent, a *father* , of a teenage *girl* , would absolutely hate their boyfriend. Whether there was a good reason or not."

"Oh so you do hate me?" Mike asked, tilting his head to the side in confusion.

"You're supposed to be smart, Wheeler."

"I am! I get all A's, thank you!" Hopper snorted.

"No, I don't hate you, kid. I thought I would because of the way you

acted last year-" Mike frowned. "Because you were a little shit then, but I understand it was hard for you. I actually kinda like you, I just mention you and El will stop with whatever tantrum she's having." Mike snorted and rolled his eyes. "Which is why you're coming over to the cabin after school Thursday. By yourself." Mike raised his eyebrows and looked at him.

"I am? Like, you're willingly letting me come over?" Hopper scoffed.

"Jeez, kid, I always willingly let you come over."

"Yeah, but not by myself." Mike retorted.

"Yeah, well, I know that if you two are alone there's no telling what you might get up to." he gave Mike a pointed look, who blushed and stuttered,

"I w-wouldn't- I wouldn't do anything." He looked horrified. "She doesn't even know anything about... that. All she knows is kissing and hand holding. And hugging. I won't be the one to tell her about it, that's for sure. Oh my *God.* " he buried his face in his hands. Hopper couldn't help but laugh at the teen, nudging him in the shoulder.

"I know, kid. I know you wouldn't do anything." Hopper snickered. "I've gotta have Joyce or even your mom talk to El about things, before she starts... you know, *that* time of the month."

"Oh my God."

"Every girl has it Wheeler, better get used to talking about it now."

"*Oh my God.*"

Wednesday, February 13, 1985

"Mike!" Lucas yelled, running up to him at the bike rack. Mike usually reached it first, and the rest came together, but Lucas was by himself.

"Who died?" Mike asked, sitting on his bike. Lucas scowled at him.

"What do I get Max for Valentine's day?" he asked, in an almost

whisper.

"Dude." Mike deadpanned, and sighed. "I'm gonna be honest, I'm *not* the person to come to for this kind of thing."

"You know what you're getting El! And you're the only other one who has a girlfriend."

"I don't know what the hell I'm doing, either, dude! She can't even go out on actual dates for a couple more months. And I'm getting her a cat because she wanted a cat."

"So? You still know more than I do." Mike rolled his eyes. "You're getting her flowers and candy too, right?"

"Yeah, but I wouldn't get flowers for Max."

"Why?"

"She doesn't like flowers."

"How do you know?"

"I heard her complaining to Steve about it at Christmas. Pay more attention, dude."

"Fuck." he groaned.

"I guess just take her on a date and give her candy or something? I'd definitely be doing that with El if I could."

"I guess. Can I come over later and ask Nancy for her opinion?" Mike snorted.

"If she's home, yeah. I don't care."

"Cool, cool. Oh! Here they come, act natural!" Lucas immediately leaned against his bike and nearly fell over. Mike face palmed.

"And I thought Dustin was the idiot friend."

"Hey!" Max snickered and shoved Dustin, putting her skateboard down and skating the rest of the way to them.

"Hey Will, did you know that your mom asked Hopper to be her boyfriend?" Mike asked. Will made a face.

"Huh? They're together?" Mike made an *oh shit* face.

"Shit, did you not know?"

"Oooh." the other three giggled. Will grinned.

"Yeah, I knew." Mike let out a breath of relief.

"Why do you keep messing with me, man!" Mike whined.

"He's trying to get you to say fuck." Max said. Mike gave Will the side eye.

"You sneaky little shit." Will grinned and shrugged.

"It's fun to mess with you." Mike pouted and crossed his arms. "I'm sorry."

"No you're not."

"You're right, I'm not."

Thursday, February 14, 1985

"I want you to come home right after school, Michael!" Karen told him over the phone.

"What? Why? I'm going over to El's!" he complained.

"I want to drive you, because it's so cold. And I'm making you, her and Hop a lasagna. Plus I'm not about to let you attempt to ride your bike all the way out there with a *kitten.* "

"Oh. Right, I forgot about that."

"Yeah, so you won't have to wait very long to see your girlfriend." she cooed.

"Mom!" he groaned and saw Joyce and Will grinning at each other.

He gave them a glare and they started laughing. "Ugh, I've gotta go, I'll see you later." he grumbled.

"Okay, I love you."

"Love you too." he hung up and trudged back to his seat at the table.

"So, what are your plans for tonight?" Will asked, waiting for Mike to look up at him. He did, and Will continued, "Since you'll be *all alone* with *El,* your *girlfriend* for four *whole hours* ?" Mike stared at him for a solid three minutes, before responding.

"You, Will Byers, are a little shit and you're not getting any closer to me saying the F word out of annoyance."

"William!" Joyce gasped dramatically, and Will snickered.

"Okay, I'm just glad you're not mad at me for calling him a little shit." Mike said, chuckling. Joyce smiled.

"I'm not mad because you're right, he is a little shit when he wants to be. So he's been trying to get you to say the F word, huh? Why, may I ask?"

"I don't know!" Mike exclaimed, mouthful of eggs, and she laughed. "I'm pretty sure he's trying to annoy it out of me for the hell of it." Will snickered and shrugged innocently.

"It's fun getting you all riled up. Ask the others." Will eyes widened a bit as if he spilled a secret. And he did. Mike eyed him, and let out a small chuckled.

"I get it now." he sing-songed. "It's not gonna work anymore, Byers. You've gotta try a lot harder than that." Joyce smiled at him and with a shake of her head, patted the top of Will's head.

"I fear for your nerves, Mike." he let out a sigh.

"Same."

The school day went by pretty well, other than his friends trying to

get on his nerves, but he didn't let it get to him, not giving them the satisfaction.

"Did you ever figure out what you're doing for Max?" Mike asked as Lucas strutted towards him. "And what's with the walk, dude? You look like you're doing a fancier version of the chicken dance." Lucas flipped him off, but nodded.

"Yeah, I'm gonna take her to Benny's old restaurant. His brother owns it now, he kept the name." Mike nodded, he'd heard Hopper talking about that.

"Yeah, I'm glad he did. Is that all you're doing?" he asked.

"We're gonna go see a movie, I think. If she wants to, at least. I took your advice and *didn't* get her flowers, and gave her chocolate and a skateboarding teddy bear." Mike snorted. "She ate all the chocolate in first period."

"Figures." he said. "And where the hell did you find a skateboarding teddy bear?"

"Walmart. There are strange things in there." Mike snorted again and nodded in agreement.

"So, Wheeler, what exactly are your intentions with El tonight?" Max asked, skating up to the two of them, Dustin and Will a few feet behind her. Mike rolled his eyes.

"Not much, ya know? We're getting her a cat, which we're gonna pick up on the way, and eat the lasagna my mom's made for me, her and Hopper."

"Dude, sucks to suck." Dustin said, clapping him on the back. Mike raised an eyebrow at him, confused. "You've gotta have a Valentine's date with the Chief, you dip."

"Mike's gonna be alone with El for *four* whole hours, guys." Will said, wiggling his eyebrows. Dustin choked on his spit and Max and Lucas gasped, before laughing.

"You know for a fact that we're not gonna do anything." Mike said,

shrugging. "I don't *care* about that. I just like being with her. Besides, we're only *thirteen* ."

"Ugh, don't get all sappy on us, Wheeler. You better go get her cat." Lucas snorted so hard it had to hurt and Mike rolled his eyes at him.

"Get your mind out of the gutter, *Lukey*. " Mike was on his bike and peddling away before Lucas had a chance to react, laughing his ass off.

Before he went home, though, he stopped by the florist to buy flowers for not only El, but his mom and sisters. He knew his mom *loved* roses, so he figured he'd get the three of them a single pink rose each and a bouquet of red for El (he also had a bouquet sent to his mom this morning, but only he and the florist new that). And that's what he did, and stopped by Melvald's to get Holly some chocolate, knowing she wouldn't really care for the rose. It's the thought that counts, though.

Karen didn't expect to get anything for Valentine's day, but there was a bouquet of red roses on her doorstep this morning, after the kids were gone to school and Holly up in her room. It didn't say who it was from, but it still put a smile on her face.

And when her son brought home a pink rose for not only her, but his sisters too- along with chocolate- she felt like her heart would burst.

"Thank you, Mike. I love it." she said, squeezing him so tight the two heard his bones crack. He chuckled.

"Jeez, mom." she let him go and grinned at him, before calling up the stairs for Nancy- who had arrived about twenty minutes before Mike- and Holly to come down. Holly practically bounded down the stairs, and was immediately curious as to why Mike held his hands behind his back. He kept spinning as she followed him, trying to get a glimpse, but it didn't work. "I'll show you in a second, Hols." he chuckled. She pouted but nodded. Nancy finally came down, half of her hair pinned up- in a way that made Mike think of the Grinch- with the rest down and curled. He bit back a grin when he saw her.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Mike wanted to give you two something." she said. "But wait a second, okay?" she told Mike, who raised an eyebrow and nodded. She came back with the camera and he let out a groan. "What? This is worth documenting!" she said, holding it up. "Okay now do it." Mike rolled his eyes but held out the two roses to them, and Karen snapped a picture that would end up on the mantel for years to come. A grin spread across Holly's face as she realized what it was, and Nancy's shocked smile, her eyes crinkling on the outside corners, and Mike's smile that could light up the whole room- at their reactions. Karen wished someone had been there to get *her* reaction, but she hoped there would be a next time. And there would be. She got a picture of Holly and Nancy both in the middle of pouncing on Mike, and the third where they were hugging, and she couldn't help the tears or the smile on her face.

"At least *someone* in this family is sweet and make you feel *loved* ." Karen said loudly, staring at Ted, who just waved a hand at her. She flipped him off.

"Fuck you, dad." Nancy said, "Thank you for the rose, Mike, I love it." he gave her a smile and she turned on her heel.

"Language! You're grounded!" Ted yelled.

"No she's not, shut up." Mike rolled his eyes.

"You're grounded too." Ted huffed.

"Like you're gonna come up with any kind of punishment, asshole." he heard Ted mutter something but didn't understand him, deciding to ignore it and go upstairs to get ready. Karen turned to her husband.

"You better prepare yourself, Ted." she hissed. "You're gonna have the fight of a lifetime as soon as they leave."

"You know all the rules Hopper's given you, right, Michael?" Karen said as she slowed to a stop. They dropped Holly's off at a friends house on the way, and Nancy had already left with Jonathan. Mike let out the most teenager-ish sigh yet.

"Yes, mom." he let out a small chuckle, picking the kitten up with one hand and cuddling her to his cheek. "We're probably just gonna stare at her for the next four hours and eat lasagna." Karen gave him a look, which he did back to her and she laughed.

"Quick question." she said as he got out of the car.

"Hm?"

"How do you expect to carry the food, the bag, flowers, the cat *and* try not to spoil the surprise?"

"Shit."

After a couple minutes, the kitten basically decided for him and wiggled her way down into his coat pocket, which had more than enough space for her. Mike looked at his mom and the two laughed. He kissed her cheek.

"I'll see you later, mom, love you!" he called as he walked away, down the now familiar trail.

"Love you too!"

It took a little longer to get there, as he was trying not to drop anything or jostle the kitten too much, but he eventually did, and if he hadn't been carrying so much stuff, she'd have tackled him. Which she basically did once his arms were free. He chuckled and hugged her back just as tight. When she finally let him go, he gave her the flowers with a shy smile. Her eyes lit up even more- if that was possible- and she kissed him on the cheek before rushing off to put them in water.

"I have a surprise for you." he told her, leading her to the couch once she finished her task. He gently pushed her shoulders and she plopped down, looking up at him. "Do you have your blindfold?" she raised her eyebrows and nodded, taking it out of her pocket. He chuckled, of course it was literally *on* her being. "Can you put it on just for a minute or so? I have to set up a little bit of stuff and I'll let you know when to take it off." she nodded and gave him a bright smile, before tying it around her head.

He made sure she couldn't actually see and went on to set up some of the stuff he'd brought in the bag. Cat toys, food and water bowl, and actual cat food. He almost freaked out for a second, thinking he forgot about the litter box and litter, but then remembered that Hopper hid it outside the cabin somewhere, under a black tarp where he kept fire wood. He made a mental note to go get it before she pissed and shit everywhere, because he did *not* wanna clean it up. The kitten let out a tiny meow, as if sensing it.

"Shhh!" he shushed her, picking her up gently and holding her up to his face. She licked his nose and he made a face. He put her on the floor for a second, and shrugged his jacket off, before picking her back up and making his way over to El. He sat next to her, and nudged her. She grinned. "Okay, you can take it off."

"Who were you shushing just now?" she asked as she pulled it off, and her eyes nearly popped out of her head when she saw the fluffy white cotton ball in his hands. Only it wasn't a cotton ball. It was a *kitten* . The look on her face almost made Mike regret the decision, but then she grinned. "Is it mine?" she whispered, as if someone would come and take the kitten. He nodded. "Really?"

"She sure is. Here." he held her out to him and El took her, holding her with both hands as she held her up to her face, nuzzling her with her cheek.

"She's so soft. And pretty." she said, looking at him. He grinned. "You got her for me?"

"It's your Valentine's day present." he told her. She leaned over and kissed him unexpectedly, and he almost forgot to kiss back. She pulled away almost as quick as she leaned in, and stood up.

"I'll be back." she told him, almost running to her room, still holding the kitten. He chuckled, leaning back on the cushions. She came back with the kitten perched on her shoulder, looking down at him. He couldn't help but laugh at that.

"I see you're a pirate, now, huh? You've got a parrot and *everything.* " she giggled,

"Arrr!" she mocked, bending her index finger as if it was a hook. He beamed at her. She smiled and handed him a small, wrapped box that had an envelope on the top. She sat back down and the kitten plopped down on her legs and curled up.

"Open the box first. Then the envelope right after, no questions." she told him. He laughed nodded and did as she asked. There was a tape sitting in the box, and he raised an eyebrow, but opened the envelope. Inside it, was a bright and colorful drawing, a pretty *good* drawing, of what looked like the two of them standing outside, the sunset behind them. "Will drew it for me. I drew the trees though, and colored everything in." he smiled at her, and then read the writing in the top left corner.

Jonathan helped me make you a mixed tape. It had some of your favorite songs, and songs I like that remind me of you. I hope you like it. Love, El

He smiled at her.

"I can't wait to listen to it." she smiled happily, and he pecked her on the cheek. His stomach rumbled, loudly, and she made a face.

"Hungry?" she asked, eyebrow raised.

"Uh, a little bit."

"Snack? Or lasagna?" she asked.

"Snack for now." he told her. She nodded and stood up, putting the kitten in her place and petting her head, before hauling Mike up and pulling him to the kitchen with her.

"Do you want eggos?" she asked. He grinned and nodded, and she went to the freezer and pulled out the box. She froze for a second, and then shut it, looking at Mike. "Does she have a name?" he shook his head.

"She's all yours, El, you can name her."

"Eggo?" she asked. He chuckled.

"If that's what you want, of course." she grinned.

"Her name is Eggo."

They snacked on eggos and played with Eggo- Mike did eventually go and get the litter box and cat litter, filling it up just in time for the tiny kitten to use the bathroom. About thirty minutes after five, Hopper came up, so El unlocked the door for him. The teens looked at him expectantly, eyebrows raised when they saw him all dressed up in dress pants, a red dress shirt and black tie.

"Looking great, Hop." Mike teased.

"Really? Is this okay to wear?" he asked nervously. Mike blinked.

"Is that why you're here?" El asked. Hopper nodded. "You look great. Now go on your date, dad."

"Okay, okay, I wanted you two's thoughts. I'll be back in a couple hours. Behave!" he left immediately after. The young couple looked at each other, shock written all over their faces, and burst into laughter.

"I figured you'd rather watch an action movie than romance and the only thing I think you'd like is *My Lucky Stars* ." Lucas said nervously, looking at his girlfriend who was stuffing her face with chocolate. She looked up at him from across the booth.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, that's cool. I love Jackie Chan." she said. "Sorry, this chocolate is really good." she said sheepishly. He laughed.

"I understand, it's my favorite." he told her. She offered him a piece. "No, it's yours." he waved her off. She threw it at him instead and gave him a smug look when it stuck to his face, having melted between her fingers. "Gross."

"Yet you still eat it." she raised her brows at him as he popped the chocolate in his mouth, wiping his face with a napkin. He shrugged.

"Never let chocolate go to waste, Max." he wiggled his eyebrows at her and she rolled her eyes, snorting.

"You're ridiculous, Stalker." he grinned at her.

"But I'm your ridicule-er?"

"That makes zero sense." she laughed. He grinned again.

"Oh well. We should probably get going if we want to make it on time." she nodded. They cleaned up their table and she packed up the rest of her chocolate to eat on the way there, and left.

"Call me crazy-" Hopper started, but Joyce interrupted him, giggling.

"You're crazy." he threw a balled up napkin at her.

"But you know how we got… you know, money?" he mouthed the last part and she nodded. "We should buy a house." she raised an eyebrow at him.

"A house?"

"A house." he confirmed. "I *know* it sounds crazy, but I've been thinking about it for a while. Look, your roof has started leaking, and despite how many times it's been fixed, it always comes back."

"Good point, but I don't know if that's a good reason-"

"Hear me out." he said. "I want to get El out of that cabin. She claims she loves it, and I think she does, but she doesn't need to grow up there. There isn't enough room as it is, and you know that once the older Wheeler gets her hands on El, she'll buy her thousands of dollars worth of clothes and we have no where to put it."

"I suppose we could find a house to fit us and the kids…" Joyce put her chin in her hand.

"I know we haven't been together long, Joy, but we were together in high school- who's to say we wouldn't have been voted as most likely to break up and get back together in fifteen years?"

"We *were* voted as that, Jim." she chuckled. "More like thirty, though."

"It is thirty." he grinned sheepishly. "God, we're old."

"Says you! I am *not* old!" she threw the napkin back at him, bouncing it off his nose and into the empty bowl in front of him. He just laughed. "I'll think about it, though. I like the idea."

"That's all I can ask of you."

"Theodore Wheeler, I just want you to know that you are *the* biggest piece of shit on this earth." Karen growled as she stormed into the house.

"Whatever Karen, I don't *care* ."

"I know you don't! You don't care about me, about your children. You kicked your son's puppy for crying out loud!"

"He threw a glass of water at me!" Ted retorted.

"BECAUSE YOU KICKED THE DAMN DOG, TED! What don't you understand? Why don't you love us? Or at least *act*like it?"

"I do-"

"Don't you dare say you love us. If you did you wouldn't ignore your children, talk to your son the way that you do."

"He isn't the son I wanted." Ted replied, standing up from his chair.

"Excuse me? He's the only son you're gonna get! He's perfect the way he is, Ted!" he muttered under his breath. "Excuse me?"

"None of your business." he hissed. She picked up a plastic cup and threw it at him. It his his shoulder.

"Damn right it is my business. What's yours is mine, Ted! Remember our wedding vows? What's yours is mine, what's mine is yours! So spill, give me every detail of what the fuck you just mumbled under your goddamn breath!"

"I said he isn't the only son." he told her, leaning against the counter. She stared at him. "He is, in fact, the worst out of the three. He's worthless, Karen, I don't see how you don't see it-" she slapped him

hard across the face.

"Get the fuck out." she hissed.

"This is MY HOU-"

"I DON'T GIVE TWO FUCKS WHOSE HOUSE IT IS, TED. GET THE FUCK OUT BEFORE I BURN IT ALL TO THE GROUND WITH YOU IN IT!" she threw the nearest thing at him- a wine glass. It hit him then the floor, shattering. He practically ran from her, up the stairs. She followed after him. "You sorry, no good, worthless piece of shit! How*dare* you call my son worthless! If anyone here is worthless, it's you. You lying, cheating bastard! Get out! Get out!" she yelled. "I hate you. The only good thing I ever got out of you were my children. Get the fuck out!"

"Don't you dare think you're gonna get anything out of me." Ted yelled, throwing clothes into a bag. "I'm the one who provides around here! You're gonna lose everything, Karen, and that's a promise."

"That's where you're fucking wrong, Ted. And you know it. I can ruin you, and you damn well better know that's exactly what I'm gonna do." she tore their wedding pictures off the wall, throwing them in his direction, not caring where they went or if they shattered. "Eighteen years wasted! Was I not good enough for you? I regret ever meeting you, you sorry fucking piece of *shit!* "

"Fuck you Karen." he grumbled, storming out of the room.

"No, fuck *you* , Ted. I hope your mother's proud of the piece of shit you've become." she hissed as he turned around in the doorway of he house. Before he could say a word, she slammed the door in his face.

"I need my keys!" he yelled.

"I don't fucking care! Walk! Find a payphone to call your fucking whore to pick you up!" he banged on the door for a couple minutes, but she couldn't be bothered, grabbing a wine bottle out of the fridge and drinking it right out the bottle. She gave it twenty minutes before looking outside to make sure he was gone. The sun was setting, getting darker by the minute. She took another drink out of the bottle

and made her way down to the basement, grabbing an empty clothes basket and taking it back up to *her* room.

She threw every single article of clothing Ted had out into the front yard, every picture of him or one with him in it. The only one she kept was their family photo, taking it out of the frame and ripping him out of it completely, placing it back in it' original place and throwing the piece of the picture out with the rest of them. She'd drank half the bottle by the time she was done, sweaty and out of breath despite the cold air outside.

It took her a few minutes to realize she was crying- and bleeding.

"Dammit." she swore, standing up shakily as she held her bloody hand up to her chest. She'd cut it on a picture frame, she assumed. She tossed the wine bottle in the pile of *trash* and walked into the house

10. Chapter 9

I apologize for the long wait, there's been lot's going on. So, a few things;

We only have a few chapters of this left- I know, I know, y'all are just like *what the actual flying fuck B*, but hear me out.

Only a few more chapters- no more than five I know that much- BUT, I've decided that I'm gonna turn Home into a series (HR is technically the first story in the series, since I've redone Home). Not sure how many parts will be in the series, just know that it'll eventually end in marriages and most likely kids ;D

Hope you guys like this chapter!

Karen didn't even attempt to explain to her children what happened while they were gone, she sat in her bathtub filled with bubbles even when they knocked on the door. She didn't want to break their hearts into a billion pieces as hers had been. This pissed the two Wheeler children off, knowing something *bad* had happened, considering the house was trashed and all of Ted's stuff was in the front yard.

The only thing she said was to Nancy, and that was asking if she'd go and pick Holly up because she'd been drinking. That pissed Mike off even more and he went down to the basement and ranted to El, not even caring about how late it was by the time the two went to bed. It's not like he'd have a restful sleep anyways.

Friday, February 15, 1985

Mike didn't sleep a bit the night before, worrying about his mom- and of course, the nightmares- so he was a little more than an asshole and a half throughout the day. He swore in Mr. Clarke's class- the last class of the day- when he kept dropping a *cotton ball* they had to use in an experiment so Mr. Clarke made him sit out- not because he was mad but he could tell the boy was more than just frustrated with a cotton ball. He asked him to stay for a few minutes when the bell

rang. Mike took his time packing his bag.

"Mike," he started, sitting in the desk next to Mike, "I'm going to ask you a question, and I want you to be honest with me."

"I'm not in trouble am I?" Mike asked, chewing on his bottom lip.

"No, no, not at all. Are things okay at home? Or is there anything going on that I should know about or you need help with? I've noticed how different you've been lately, Mike. I just want to make sure you're okay." Mike hesitated for a couple seconds, and sighed, rubbing at his eyes.

"I honestly don't know," he said, finally. "Something's going on with my parents, my dad left last night and my mom threw all his things outside but she won't tell us what's going on. And with other things? You wouldn't be able to help. I can't tell you why because I promised I wouldn't tell anyone else and it's not like you'd believe me anyways." Mike ranted, hardly taking a breath. "I can't freaking sleep at night, I have these- these nightmares and I-I don't know how to stop them? Talking about them will make me seem absolutely insane. On top of all that, my dad literally hates me, why? I don't know. He kicked our puppy and got mad when I threw a cup of water at him." Mike huffed and didn't say anything else, looking down at his feet.

"Oh, well… Mike, you can always, *always* talk to me. If you ever want to talk or tell me anything, it will not leave this room or my mouth." Mike's eyes flickered to Mr. Clarke's face. "And as for the stuff with your parents, I don't… I don't really know what to tell you. I'm sure your mom will tell you what's going on soon. Does she usually tell you guys things?" Mike scoffed.

"No, we either hear it ourselves when they fight or when she's wine drunk and telling her friends on the phone."

"Oh, well. Maybe whatever happened was bad enough that she doesn't want to talk about it at all. Do you *want* to talk about those nightmares?" Mike shook his head. "Well, you don't have to. Not until you're ready, that is. And I don't think your dad hates you. He's troubled- or really messed up in the head if he acts like he does."

"He wouldn't go to a football game with me last year." Mike told him. "He loves football and I hate it, but I tried to get him to spend time with me, you know? But he'd rather sleep in his Lay-Z-Boy. I asked Chief Hopper if he wanted to go with me but he decided that he wanted to do what *I* wanted, so that *I* could have fun."

"Chief Hopper?" Mr. Clarke asked, eyebrows raised.

"It's a long… long story." Mike sighed. "But anyways, the Chief of police is more like a father to me than my own, and I haven't even *really* known the man that long. Does that sound normal to you?"

"Honestly? No. But really, you kids aren't normal." Mr. Clarke said. Mike made a face. "And it's not a bad thing, don't get me wrong. Nothing about this town is normal if you ask me. I mean, what with Will going missing and having a funeral for him and then he's saved? And Dustin asking me about the salt and all, then what happened at the school. It's weird." Mike chuckled a little, going just slightly paler.

"You're telling me."

Tuesday, February 19, 1985

Over the next few days, Mr. Clarke watched as Mike seemed to grow angrier and angrier, eyes darker and darker with exhaustion. While he was writing notes on the board, he noticed Mike fall asleep with his chin in his hand. He sighed and looked at Dustin, who was seated next to Mike and looking at him, worried.

"Dustin, will you come here please?" he asked. Dustin nodded and stood up. He sort of jostled Mike and he started, rubbing at his eyes and writing the notes down quickly.

"What's up?" Dustin asked.

"Will you take Mike to the nurses office? And make sure he goes there?"

"Uh, sure." he walked over to Mike and whispered to him. Mr. Clarke could've sworn he saw Mike roll his eyes, but ignored it. He wrote a note and handed it to Dustin and clapped Mike on the back as he

walked by him. He went back to writing notes, deciding to make a call after class.

He leaned back in his chair as the phone rang, only ringing a couple of times before Karen answered.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Mrs. Wheeler?"

"Yes."

"This is Mr. Clarke, I'm Mike's science teacher."

"Yes, I remember you. Is he in trouble?"

"No, no. I just want to speak to you about him."

"Okay, what's wrong?" Mr. Clarke could hear something different in her voice. Other times they'd talked, whether by phone or in person, she sounded so sure of herself, confident. But now? Not even close.

"Mike has been… different. He's angry, and has trouble focusing in class."

"I thought he wasn't in trouble?"

"He's not, I'm just worried about him. I asked him a few days ago if there was anything going on at home and he said he didn't know. He just knows something is wrong, and that you're not telling them anything." he expected her to get angry with him, but instead, she just sighed and said,

"Is there anyway I can come up to the school one day and we'll talk?"

Thursday, February 21, 1985

"Michael Wheeler, please come to the front office. Michael Wheeler to the front office." Mike jolted slightly when he heard his name and Max snickered. He glared at her and glanced at the clock.

"You can take your things, there's only a few minutes of class left." Ms. Toney said. He nodded and packed up his stuff and made his way to the office. He was surprised to see his mom and sisters waiting for him with Mr. Clarke.

"Who died?" he asked.

"No one," Karen chuckled, "Just thought I'd bring you guys some Burger King." she held up two bags. Mike raised an eyebrow and looked at Nancy, who shrugged.

"Okay… but why is Nancy here?"

"It's lunch time right now, so I decided to come hang out with you and your little nerds." she replied. He rolled his eyes.

"Hey Mikey!" Holly cheered, just realizing he'd walked in. She hugged his legs and he chuckled, patting the top of her head.

"Why don't you three head on to the lunch room? Me and your mom have a few things to discuss."

"And no, you're not in trouble, Mike. It's school related." Karen lied. She didn't want to, but her son was a stubborn little shit sometimes.

"Okay…? Well, come on, Holly. Wanna see the place you're gonna go to school in like ten years?" he asked. She nodded and raised her arms up. He managed to *not* roll his eyes and picked her up anyways. Nancy took the food and the two made their way towards the cafeteria. The bell had rung while Mike was on his way to the office, so most students were in the cafeteria already, and stared at Nancy as Mike led her to the Party's table.

"To what do we owe the pleasure?" Dustin asked, grinning at Nancy.

"Oh, shut it." she rolled her eyes, sitting next to Max. Mike put Holly on the seat next to Nancy and sat down. "Shit, I forgot her juice. I'll be right back." she said, and rushed out the door.

"She's gonna go snoop." Mike said.

"Snoop on what?"

"Mom and Mr. Clarke." he replied, reaching into the bag and grabbing Holly's chicken nuggets and fries for her. She grinned up at her and he smiled back. "They're having a *discussion*."
Karen and Mr. Clarke were sitting in one of the smaller meeting rooms, across from each other.

"Ted… he's never been a good father to them, not really. He changed a few diapers here and there, never helped with Holly. Mike knew how to change a diaper by the time she was a month old, and always helped me. The last couple of years have been… bad. Ted has been getting on Mike for the smallest things, being an all around dick, you know?" Mr. Clarke nodded. "And last week, on Valentines day… the kids were out and we had a huge fight, one that's ended out marriage."

"If you don't mind me asking, what happened?"

"I don't mind. I've been keeping it in, haven't told anyone, not even my mom. I get my gossiping from her, and I know you wouldn't tell anyone. But… Ted has been cheating. For a while now."

"Oh."

"And that's not even the worst of it." She ran a hand through her hair. "He's got other kids. I don't know how many or how old, but… He said that Mike isn't the only son. That he's the worst out of the three, and that he's worthless. That's when I started screaming and throwing stuff at him, to get him to leave. How could someone call their child worthless?" she looked close to tears. "That's why I haven't told them anything. I don't want them to feel the heartbreak and anger I feel. Mike hates his dad, I know he does, but to know that his dad thinks he's worthless? He's just a kid, he shouldn't have that kind of thing said to or about him."

"Karen, this is all horrible, and I'm so sorry. I really am." Mr. Clarke said, giving her a sympathetic look. "Ted is a grade A dick, I agree. But I think you should tell them. Maybe not *everything* but they deserve to know. Not telling them will only make them angrier and angrier. And Mike is what, going on fourteen soon?" Karen nodded. "He's growing up, and he's gonna find out one way or another. Nancy too."

"I know, but I'm scared of Mike's reaction the most. He's changed so much in the last year or so, I don't know why or what happened for him to be like this." And she really didn't. She knew everything that happened, but El's back and they're happy together, so what's wrong with him?

"Maybe you could take him to… a therapist? Or I can have the guidance counselor talk to him every once in a while."

"I don't know, I think that would make him even angrier." There was a slight knock on the door and Karen jumped, and Nancy poked her head in, eyes red and watery. She walked in all the way, holding Holly's juice so tight even she was surprised it hadn't exploded everywhere.

"If you don't tell him when he gets home from school, I will, mom." she said quietly. "How could you keep something like this from us?"

"I'm so sorry, baby, I am. I wish I didn't have to tell you at all, that he hasn't done this. I didn't know what else to do, I didn't want you guys to hurt."

"The only one that'll really be hurt here is you, mom. Mike hates dad, hell, I hate him now! Holly doesn't understand what's going on. It really sucks, and yeah it hurts that he loves these other kids more, but if that's what it takes, I'm glad he's gone. He's always been horrible to us."

"I know, and I'm sorry. If I had known sooner I'd have gotten you out of there a long time ago. I promise you. And I promise I'll tell Mike later."

When Nancy went back to the lunchroom, her eyes had cleared up but, apparently she looked like;

"You look like you've seen a ghost." Max said. "The hell happened on your way to the office?"

"I saw some little twelve year olds making out. Or *trying* to, at least."

Karen tried to keep herself busy while she waited for Mike, baking

his favorite cookies and deciding to make his favorite dinner- no matter how this goes. She jumped when the door opened and he yelled,

"I'm home!"

She let out a deep breath and called,

"Mike! Come here please!" she heard his bag hit the ground and his footsteps as he trudged into the kitchen.

"Hey." he greeted.

"Hey Sweetie. Can you sit with me for a few minutes?"

"Yeah, but I'm going to El's, remember? Hop's got her some books to study and I'm gonna help her some stuff."

"It won't take long." he nodded. She took another deep breath and he eyed her, and she started. She told him more than she'd told Mr. Clarke- leaving out the worthless part, of course. Mike just stared at her the whole time.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, Mike. I just… I know your father never really loved me, but like the stupid, young girl I was, I thought he did back then and I just made myself believe it all these years."

"You're not… you're not stupid, mom." Mike said softly. He sighed. "If anyone's stupid here, it's him. I don't understand why or how he couldn't love you. Me? I understand. I'm a nerd and not a football star- as if I'd be old enough to *be* one anyways- so of course he doesn't love me. I've known that for a while."

"Mike, I'm sure he loves you deep down. I don't want you to think that."

"Then why has he treated me the way he does?" he actually looked close to tears. "I don't love him so it doesn't matter. I'm fine with it and I'm glad he's gone. I'd better go, though, mom. Thanks for telling me." he stood up and kissed her cheek and all but ran out of the kitchen. Karen sighed and buried her face in her hands.

Mike was sort of… sad, to know that El wasn't at the cabin when he got there- he'd forgotten they had a set time and that she was at the Byers with Joyce- who was teaching her… things, for another fifteen minutes.

He began debating in his head whether to knock on the door- Hopper was home- or just sit on the porch and wait for his girlfriend. The former was- technically not- chosen, when Hopper walked out on the porch, almost jumping out of his boots when he saw Mike just standing there.

"What are you doing here so early, kid? You know she's got another fifteen minutes, right?" Hopper raised his eyebrows at him.

"Yeah, yeah… I uh, I know." Mike nodded.

"What's wrong?"

"Noth-nothing. Why would you think somethings wrong?"

"Look kid, I may be getting old and my eyes are slowly dying on me, but I ain't blind and I ain't stupid. I can see somethings up." Mike shrugged. "Come on in. We're gonna talk." Mike sighed and followed the Chief, plopping down on the couch. Hopper sat across from him in an armchair. "Alright, tell me what's going on. And don't tell me nothing, I already told you I can see something *is* wrong." Mike huffed and crossed his arms.

"My dad cheated on my mom and has at least two other kids- sons- who are better than me and he'd rather be with them than us." Mike shrugged. Hopper stared at him for a couple seconds.

"...What?" He said, finally. Mike nodded.

"Yep."

"Ted Wheeler… was able to get *another* woman?"

"I really hope there isn't a double meaning to that about my mom, because if so, I'll punch you again."

"No, kid." he shook his head. "I just… I never expected the dick to

ever even get married when we were younger, and no offense but I know the main reason your mom married him was for money."

"I mean… yeah, but she told me that when she was younger she actually thought he loved her. If he was anything like he is today I don't see how she felt like that, but…" he shrugged.

"Damn, I'm sorry, kid." Hopper said, patting his shoulder. "You kids don't deserve him." Mike just shrugged. "Uh, when did you find out about this?"

"Fifteen minutes ago."

"So it hasn't really sunk in, yet, huh?"

"Nope."

"You think you'll cry or punch something again? *Me* again?"

"I don't know." Mike shrugged.

It wasn't long after that, El and Joyce arrived, El immediately- of course- going to Mike and hugging him tight.

"You're sad." she told him.

"Um…"

"And mad?" she asked.

"Yeah, uh, just my dad again." Mike told her. "He's not important right now, let's work on your school and then I'll tell you, okay?"

"Promise?"
"Promise."
Mike did eventually tell her that night, with probably the least amount of emotion her or Hopper have ever heard from him. El immediately wanted to find the disgusting man and beat his ass, but the two just barely convinced her not to. She held onto Mike's hand until it was time for him to go home- whereas Hopper took him home and she rode with them.

Monday, February 25, 1985

It took about three whole days for it to really sink in for Mike. Over the weekend, his mom had been trying to talk to him and Nancy a lot more about what was going on in their lives, and for the most part, Nancy told her. Mike didn't exactly have that much of a life outside of school and the usual gatherings with the Party, so he didn't know what she expected him to tell her.

As it turns out, Nancy wasn't the only one who heard the conversation between Karen and Mr. Clarke- *Stacy* did too- and by Monday morning, everyone in the school- and probably the whole damn town- knew about the Wheeler's. Which also meant Troy and James knew, and the two assholes waited for Mike outside after school. Mike heard people whispering and looking at him all day- making sure to keep his head down in class and write notes to distract himself. It didn't stop people from asking questions and being assholes about it, so, he was very much annoyed and ready to murder someone by the end of the day.

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me." Mike grumbled as he and the Party walked towards their bikes.

"Well, well, well, if it's isn't the freaks of Hawkins." Troy started off. "You four have a free pass today, but Frog Face here? Boy do I have some words for you."

"You might wanna back the fuck off, Troy." Mike hissed, yanking his bike out of the rack.

"Just gonna call me by my name? Not some bad word?" he said in a baby voice.

"Why should I waste my time coming up for some new dumb fucking name for you when it's already there for me to call you?"

"Damn, daddy issues got your panties in a twist, don't they?" Troy glared and James snickered. "I don't blame the old fuck for leaving- with that family of yours. Worthless little Frog Face, Nancy the Slut-"

"Troy, I swear to God." Lucas stepped forward but Dustin held him

back.

"That wino of a mom and that stupid little-" Troy couldn't even finish his sentence, Mike stepped forward and punched the *hell* out of Troy, blood *squirting* out of his- probable- broken nose. It happened so fast the Party couldn't stop him. Not like they'd have wanted to, anyways.

"Holy shit!" Dustin shrieked, slapping a hand over his mouth.

Mike picked up his bike, got on it and took off without a word.

"I'm gonna get you for this!" Troy yelled. Mike just flipped him off. The others got on their bikes and tried to catch up with Mike, but by the time they passed the high school, there was no sign of him.

"We need to tell Nancy." Will said, pointing at where she, his brother and Steve were walking out of the school. They nodded in agreement and Dustin took off into the parking lot, screaming,

"STEVE! STEVE!"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Jesus Christ, where's the fire?" Steve asked.

"I don't know but a lot of shit just went down-"

"Where's my brother?" Nancy interrupted.

"-with Mike and Troy." Dustin finished. The others caught up with him and started trying to tell them what happened.

"Alright, alright, one at a time!" Steve said, holding his hands up. "Max, what happened?"

"Everyone at school has been whispering about Mike and looking at him and asking him questions." she said. "And Troy and James were waiting outside for him after school and Troy started insulting Mike and saying he didn't blame Mike's dad for leaving- which we didn't even know about- and started insulting him, you, his mom *and* Holly. Mike punched the shit out of Troy and broke his nose- blood squirted everywhere."

"It looked like something out of a movie." Dustin added.

"Where'd Mike go?" Jonathan asked. They shrugged.

"He went that way." Lucas pointed in the direction he went.

"Wait, he didn't tell you guys what happened?" Nancy asked. They shook their heads.

"I'm gonna go get my car." Jonathan said. Steve nodded in agreement and the two went to get their cars.

"Dad's been cheating on mom." Nancy said. "Has at least two other kids, both boys. They had a huge fight on Valentines day and mom found out and kicked him out."

"Holy shit." Lucas said. "I was wondering what all that shit in the yard was."

"That's what mom and Mr. Clarke were talking about and I heard them, then mom told Mike after school."

"Where do you think he went?" Max asked.

"Either to the cabin, his house or the Byers." Lucas told her.

"Well, let's split up and go look." Nancy said as the two cars rolled up behind them. "Will, Lucas, with me and Jon, you two go with Steve." Lucas looked like he wanted to argue but did as he was told, saluting the rest of the group and getting into the car.

"Fuckin' nerd." Max huffed, getting in the car.

"Yet you're dating him." Dustin told her, getting in the back. He already knew there was no arguing with her about that.

"Hey, Mr. Wheeler, it's been a few days!" Flo greeted, having glanced up at him when he walked in. She looked up at him when he didn't reply and gasped. "What happened to you?" she demanded, standing up and rounding the desk. "Hopper!" she yelled.

"What!" he yelled back.

"We have a bit of a situation here!"

Mike could faintly hear Hopper grumbling as he made his way towards the front, immediately going silent when he saw Mike.

"Did it sink in?" he asked hesitantly.

"It sank in." Mike croaked.

The boy had bloody fists and blood shot eyes, a bit of blood smeared on his face.

"Come on. I've got him, Flo." Hopper nudged the boy into his office and sat him down, grabbing a first aid kit on the way. He crouched in front of him. "Hold out your hands, palms down." Mike did so. "Wanna tell me what happened?"

"Not really."

"Gonna tell me anyway?" Hopper gave him a look and Mike let out a small huff.

"Everyone at school knows. Don't know how. Kept talking about it, asking me questions."

"This is gonna sting." Hopper warned as he cleaned the small cuts and scratches on the boys knuckles. Mike hissed a little but otherwise didn't move or make a sound.

"Troy and James were waiting outside after school. Troy started talking shit and called Nancy a slut and my mom a wino and he started to call Holly stupid but I punched him."

"This isn't how… this happened, is it?" Hopper gestured towards his hands. Mike shook his head.

"A lot of blood came out of his nose so I think it's broken, but I don't care. I left after that and went in the woods."

"And what happened in the woods?"

"A tree." he replied. Hopper wrapped bandages around his hands

carefully.

"A tree happened?"

"I punched it. A lot. And the ground. And screamed."

"No wonder it sounds like you lost your voice." Mike shrugged. Hopper finished with his other hand and stood, placing the kit on his desk. "Come on, let's get you home, kid."

11. Chapter 10

As Nancy, Jonathan and the two party members were about to leave the Wheeler's house, Hopper drove up. Karen had followed them outside- Holly in tow- prepared to get in the car and help them look for her son.

"Search party is off." Hopper called, getting out of the car. "I got him with me."

"Thank God." Karen breathed, putting her bag on the steps and walking towards the truck. "The kids got me all worried." she told Hopper.

"Well, considering all that's happened, you know?" she nodded. Mike got out of the truck and slammed the door shut, letting out a quiet huff.

"Michael, what were you thinking? You had us all worried!" she scolded, but pulled him in for a hug, squeezing him tight.

"I kinda worried myself for a second there, too." he mumbled, hugging her back.

"Christ, Wheeler, what happened to your hands?" Max asked. Lucas had apparently gone and called Dustin on his supercom and they'd been close by.

"A tree." Mike deadpanned. "The dirt."

"I take it someone didn't stuff a frog down your throat either, eh?" Steve joked. Dustin smacked him in the shoulder.

"No." Mike replied. He let go of his mom and made his way towards the house, patting Holly on the top of the head as he passed her.

"Michael! We need to talk!" Karen said, following him. "You kids go home. He's fine." she said, turning to them.

"But-"

"You heard her." Nancy sighed. "I have a feeling Mike's gonna blow up at her or something. At least go to Lucas' or Will's for now, I'll let you guys know if anything happens."

"I'll probably end up bringing El over later." Hopper said. "He was supposed to come after school but I don't see that happening now."

"You know what, no." Max shook her head. "We're gonna talk to that scrawny little shit too and he's gonna tell us what's going on."

"An intervention, if you will." Lucas said. Karen sighed.

"Fine, come on." As the group walked into the house and Karen forced Mike to stay in the living room, Joyce drove up. Jonathan and Steve filled her in on what was going on and she went in the house too. The two stayed outside to entertain Holly and Rosie.

"Is this an intervention or some shit?" Mike asked, crossing his arms from where he sat on the floor. The Party, Karen, Hopper, Joyce and Nancy sat around him in the living room.

"More or less." Dustin quipped.

"Well? Let's get it over with."

"Okay, well…" Karen looked around at everyone, unsure of what to say.

"Why don't you start with telling us how you feel?" Joyce asked.

"And don't be a sarcastic little jerk about it." Nancy added.

"Nancy." Karen warned.

"What? Half the shit that comes out of his mouth is sarcastic and *someone* has to be strict with him." Mike scoffed and she glared.

"You guys wanna know how I feel?" he asked. They nodded. "Hmm, let's see. First off, I feel pissed. At Nancy for that comment, but mainly at myself."

"Why at yourself?" Max asked.

"Because of the way I've been acting." he said. "And because this shouldn't be happening right now, when everyone else dealt with a lot more than I did."

"What do you mean? Dealt with what?" Hopper asked.

"You all have worse things to deal with than I do after these last two years. Why do I have nightmares about you all dying? Why am I so angry all the time? No, no, the real question is- Why are we focusing on me right now when everyone else has bigger demons than I do? Why not focus on Will and El- who had it much worse than me?"

"Because we talk about it." Will *hissed*. Mike started at that, looking at his best friend with wide eyes at the tone of voice. "Because we tell others what we're going through. About our own nightmares- our demons that we face. All of us, not just me and El. But you? You won't talk about it. Ever."

"Will's right." Dustin said. "You haven't uttered a single word- yes, I said uttered. I'm smart too." Dustin noticed the look on Max's face when he said the word, but continued. "You haven't *uttered* a *single* word about what *you* dealt with. And frankly, we're sick and tired of your shit and you blocking us out."

"Yeah, it's hard for all of us, dude." Lucas said. "We want to be here for you and you're starting to drive us away. We feel like you don't *want* to tell us. And why is that? Do you not trust us or something?"

"No." Mike whispered. "That's not it all- the exact opposite. Oh my God." Mike ran a hand over his face. "I want to tell you but it's so *hard* to even think about. The nightmares I have… *those* would be what drive you away- they're awful, Lucas. *Awful*. I've tried my best not to drive you away and- God- I'm doing it anyway." he buried his face in his hands. Joyce put a hand on his shoulder but he scrambled away from her, standing up. "No, no. Don't-" he ran a hand through his hair.

"Okay, calm down Mike." Hopper said, holding his hands up.

"Telling me to calm down is not the right thing to do right now, Hop." Mike sniffed. "If you want me to talk about it- the things I've

seen, the nightmares, *everything*, you have to promise not to leave me. Don't leave me alone, because if you do, I… I don't know what I- what I'd do."

"We promise, Mikey." Karen said. Everyone nodded in agreement.

"We love you, Mike. No matter how bad the things you tell us are, we'll still be here." Will said. Mike nodded.

"Will you sit down, Sweetie?" Joyce asked. Mike shook his head. "Okay, whatever you want to do." he nodded and leaned against the wall.

"O-okay. Um… first thing, well, I don't remember the last time I slept more than seven hours at night, and that's only the beginning." he started. "That started after Will got back and… and El was gone. I'd sleep, yeah, but I'd wake up every hour… never a restful sleep. Always worried I'd get a call that Will was gone again or… if he'd never been found." Mike wiped at his eyes, tears gathering in the corners. "Then the nightmares… the demogorgon would kill everyone I ever loved or I'd see Brenner torturing El, then turn into the demogorgon and kill her and… I'd wake up screaming but- but no one ever heard me. No one ever heard me scream.

"And then things went to shit again. The demodogs, the tunnels, the shadow monster, El coming back… I saw Bob get mauled to death. I turned around to make sure you and Mrs. Byers were okay and- and I saw him. I saw him, the blood- I heard the *screams* and I hear them every night. You-you told me not to look. You told me not to and I did anyway. I wish I hadn't. I saw all of them- all the bodies, all the blood. I wanted to puke but I had to hold on to Will. I couldn't let him go- couldn't put him down." Mike gripped at his hair.

"That night at the Christmas Tree lighting, when you were still awake, mom." Mike looked at her. Her eyes were red, a single tear falling, more ready to fall. "That night I had a nightmare, that's why I was awake. All I could remember was hearing screams and gunshots and something roaring. I remember hearing the sound of flesh being ripped apart. That's the worst sound you can ever imagine hearing." he let out a gut wrenching sob, sliding down the wall until he was sitting, knees brought up to his chest. "And seeing it happen and

hearing it is a whole other fucking level and I'm sorry for saying that word but my God, I'm so *scared* that I'll hear it *again*."

"You're never gonna hear that sound again." Hopper said, crouching in front of the terrified and crying boy. "*Never*. I promise you that. The gate was closed, Brenner's dead. No more monsters to cause that sound."

"You don't know that." Mike shook his head. "There are others like El. More that can open a gate."

"Maybe not, but I can promise that nothing will happen to you or her, or any of you, again. Okay?" Mike stared at him for a few seconds and nodded, finally.

"Is there… anything else you want or need to say?" Nancy asked. He sniffed and nodded. He looked at Max.

"I'm sorry." he said. "I never should've acted that way towards you, you never did anything wrong and you're one of my best friends."

"It's in the past, Mike." she told him, shaking her head. "Don't worry about it." he sniffed again and looked at Hopper.

"The night that everything ended… and I was screaming at Hop- he- you… you hugged me tighter than my dad ever did." Mike looked at the man. "I felt like I was loved, cared for even after I'd been such an ass and had yelled and hit you, but you hugged me anyways. And you never said anything else about it. I told Mr. Clarke that you've been more of a father to me than my dad has ever been. And it's the truth. So I want to apologize. To you, and to everyone else for the way I've acted, the lies and that I made you feel like I couldn't trust you. I'm sorry."

"Can I hug you, kid?" Hopper asked. Mike wiped at his eyes and nodded, moving so he was sitting up completely. He raised his arms slightly and Hopper hugged him tight, just like he had that night, if not tighter. Mike clutched at the back of Hoppers jacket and let go, crying his heart out, sobs muffled by Hoppers shirt. Slowly, everyone joined the hug, all starting to cry

It took a little while, but eventually Mike calmed down and loosened his hold on Hopper to wipe his eyes again. Everyone else let go to give him room, cleaning their own faces.

"Here, baby." Karen said quietly, holding out a damp rag. He gave her a small smile and plopped it on his face, letting out a satisfied sigh at the coolness.

"I need a nap." he muttered.

"What?" Hopper asked.

"I need a nap." he repeated, a little louder. Hopper snorted.

"I bet you do kid. Which is why everyone- as in the children- need to get their asses out of here and go home and let the boy sleep." Hopper stood up and looked at the young teens, who all started complaining. "Come on, go ask Steve if he'll take you home." he told Max and Dustin.

"Um, actually, I was hoping I could stay with someone tonight?" Max asked. "Because, um, Billy isn't gonna be home this week and Neil is being… Neil. I'd rather not be the source of his anger."

"You, outside." Hopper told her. Her eyes widened. "You're not in trouble, kid. I need to talk to you." she nodded and went outside, Lucas following closely. "Henderson, get your ass outside and ask Harrington to take you home." Dustin pouted but nodded.

"I'll see you later, Mike." Dustin patted his shoulder and Mike nodded, waving a little. Hopper followed Dustin outside.

"Do we have a first aid kit anywhere?" Nancy asked, looking at her mom.

"Yeah, in the bathroom down here." Nancy nodded and went to get it. "Why-? Oh." Blood was slowly seeping through the bandages on Mike's hands. "Come on, baby. Sit on the couch." she helped Mike up and he plopped down on the couch.

"Punching a tree is never a good idea." he sighed.

"Do you feel a little better?" Joyce asked. Will sat on the couch next to Mike.

"Yeah… it feels like a weight has been lifted." he said, rubbing at his eyes with his wrist instead of his hands. "If I could only just sleep *without* nightmares."

"Maybe talking about them has helped." Will said. "It helped me." Mike nodded.

"Hopefully."

Nancy came back with the first aid kit and sat in front of Mike on the floor.

"Jesus Christ, Mike, how hard were you hitting the tree?" Will asked, seeing the cuts on his friend's hand. Mike shrugged.

"Hard? I left a mark in the tree I think. Knocked some bark off it." he winced as Nancy took the bandages off and started cleaning them again. His hands throbbed, now that he could actually *feel* something.

"Sorry." Nancy muttered. "I know it hurts."

"It's fine." he shrugged.

By the time Nancy had finished with Mike's hands, taking her time to do it perfectly, everyone had left except for Hopper and Max. Karen had gone outside to see what was going on, and now, Max was spending the rest of the week- maybe even longer- at Mike's house. When the three came back in, Holly was on Max's hip and Rosie ran and jumped on the couch, whining and nuzzling at Mike's arms and stomach. He chuckled a little and scratched behind her ears. She settled down and curled up, half on his lap and half on the couch between Mike and the arm of the couch. Mike put his head in the crook of his arm and let his hand hang over the side.

"I'm gonna take Red here to get some clothes and make sure nothing happens."
Hopper said. "And we're gonna pick El up and bring her over for a while, because I'm sure she's worried since you didn't go over there after school."

"*Shit* I forgot." he groaned.

"It's fine, kid. I'm sure she'll understand."

"Yes." Hopper jumped and turned to see El, arms crossed.

"What the hell-"

"I walked." she said. "I had a bad feeling, and I went in the void and heard everything. You didn't call." she glared at Hopper.

"You're not supposed to just leave and *walk* here."

"What else was I supposed to do? Wait on you to get back?" she fired back. "I was worried. Sue me." Mike couldn't help but smile at her response.

"We'll talk about this later. C'mon, Red." Hopper walked out. Max looked at El, who shrugged. Max put Holly down and followed Hopper. El rushed over to Mike, jumping on the couch next to him and hugging him tight.

"Why didn't you tell me any of that?" she asked.

"I didn't think it was… important. Or top priority."

"You're important, and *my* top priority." Hopper had explained to her what that meant a few days ago when telling her shoveling poop was top priority for them- mainly her. He gave her a watery smile and sniffed.

"Here Mikey." Holly said in her cute toddler voice, holding both hands out, a handful of tissues in one hand and a teddy bear in the other. "Mama gives me both of these when I'm sad." Mike almost started crying again, and instead clutched the bear in one hand and hugged the small girl.

"Thanks, Holly." she gave him a bright smile and skipped off, Rosie jumping down and following her curiously.

"You should sleep." El told him.

"I don't know… the nightmares…"

"I'll be here." she said. "I'll wake you up if you have one." he gave her a smile and nodded.

"Thank you."

The two awkwardly moved around until they were both lying on the couch, Mike's head resting on El's shoulder as she played with his hair. It didn't take long for him to fall asleep, and when he did, he was *out.*

When Hopper and Max got back, it was nearing seven in the evening and Karen was making dinner, Holly was watching cartoons in the living room with her brother and his girlfriend asleep on the couch.

"Be quiet." Nancy whispered to them as she came down the stairs. "He's been asleep since you left. He needs it." Hopper nodded. "I'll take her bag upstairs." he handed it to her and she gave Max a smile before going back to her room. The Hopper made his way into the kitchen, where Karen was stirring Mac and Cheese, still making Mike's favorite dinner, which was in the oven. Lasagna, and the Mac and Cheese was for Holly. Max went in the living room and sat with Holly and played with Rosie.

"Dinner will be ready in ten minutes." she told them. "You're more than welcome to stay, Jim."

"Thanks, Karen." Hopper smiled at her.

"And El can stay the night if she feels she needs to, and if you let her. I know they won't do anything."

"I know they won't, especially since I'm pretty sure he'll be knocked out until tomorrow afternoon- if he isn't going to school."

"Oh no, he's staying home and getting rest. For as long as he needs." Hopper nodded.

"I just don't want them to think this is gonna happen often. Tonight is just a special case considering all that's been going on with him."

"I understand, believe me, I'd much rather my teenage son *not* have his teenage girlfriend over at night but…" she shrugged. "If she helps him sleep, I don't care."

"Does the dog sleep with him at night?" he asked, making a face.

"No, she stays down here. Or, she's supposed to but she's always in front of his door when I get up in the mornings."

"Maybe you guys should let her in his room. She might help, the feeling of someone- or something, more like- with him, might ground him and help with the nightmares."

"You have a point. I'll ask him if he's alright with it and we'll try it out. The main reason we don't let her in rooms because she makes *the* mess of a lifetime. And with their rooms? Lord, she'd have a ball in there, as much stuff as they have in there."

"I know what you mean, that damn cat has shredded at least four rolls of toilet paper. And that shit ain't cheap." Karen chuckled. "Wheeler has ruined my curtains, I tell you. If he hadn't gotten her that cat…"

"If I remember correctly, he asked *you* if he could get her one, and you *said yes*."

"Yeah, yeah." he waved her off and she laughed. "It's my fault too."

"Mhm."

It wasn't long after that Mike woke up, because Rosie barked when she saw another dog on the TV and it woke him up.

"Jesus." he muttered. "What time is it?"

"Seven something." El told him sitting up. She looked at him and giggled a little at his hair.

"What?" he asked, sitting up as well and scratching his head, making his hair even worse.

"Your hair." she replied. "It's all crazy."

"Oh." he smoothed it down a little but it popped right back up. She just smiled and didn't say anything.

"Oh, you're awake." Karen said, walking in the living room, having come to get Holly. "Dinner's ready, Sweetie." he yawned and nodded. He and El stood and went in the dining room and sat at the table next to each other, Mike beside Holly and El on his other side. Everyone else was sat already, and as Karen dished out the lasagna, she told Mike, "You can have as much as you want, I'm sure you're hungry." he shrugged and nodded a little.

It was quiet for a few minutes as they ate, and eventually, with a little grin, Max asked,

"So, Hopper, are you gonna arrest Mike for breaking Troy's nose?" Mike glared at her and Hopper snorted.

"No, from what I've heard, the kid deserved it. I have a feeling that if he hadn't broken his nose, Mike would be the one with something broken." Mike nodded, looking down at his food.

"Troy tripped Mike on the playground when we first met." El said. "I didn't see it but he told me."

"How long has he been bothering you kids?" Hopper asked. Mike snorted.

"As long as I can remember." Mike replied. "Started in first grade and as the years go by it gets worse and worse."

"I'll make him pee his pants again if you want." El told him. Mike smiled at her.

"As awesome as that was, I don't think that'd be a great idea." he told her. "Thank you, though." she shrugged and smiled back.

"You're welcome, Bean." Mike choked on his drink.

"I forgot about that."

12. Chapter 11

So, I know I said a few chapters ago that El already started her period and stuff, but I'm changing it so that she hasn't- because I actually want to write it now (some of it at least), but it's not in the chapter. You'll see what I mean. Therefore, by the time this is posted that chapter will have a few less words XD.

After dinner, Karen sent Mike upstairs to have a shower before he went to bed, Nancy went to call Jonathan, and while Karen was making a bed in Nancy's room for Max, Hopper talked to El.

"I don't want you and him sleeping in the same bed." he was telling her.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because… you're a girl, and he's a boy." she just stared at him. "Man, I really need to get Joyce to talk to you." he sighed. "I heard he has a bunk bed, so if he does, I want you to sleep on the top of it, or the bottom. Whichever you choose and he has to sleep on the other one, got it?"

"Uh, sure?" It came out like a question. He ruffled her hair.

"Just no funny business."

"No funny business." she confirmed, even though she had no idea what it meant.

"I'll be glad to explain to her what you're talking about, Hop." Max said with a small grin.

"Oh no, an *adult* needs to talk to her- wait, what do *you* know about *funny business*?" Hopper asked, pointing at the red head.

"Um, health class?" she said. "I pay attention. All the boys were red faced when the teacher talked about periods."

"Periods? Like at the end of a sentence?"

"Hop, has El had a period yet?" Karen asked. Hopper shook his head. "If you want me to, I'll be glad to talk to her about them tomorrow? I know Joyce is fully capable to do it but, I have two daughters, one of which has been having her period for a few years now, so…"

"Uh, yeah, that'd be great."

They heard footsteps coming down the stairs and looked up to see Mike with dripping wet hair, a towel thrown over his shoulders.

"Oh, you're still here." Mike muttered, coming to a stop at the bottom of the stairs.

"Yeah, kid. El is gonna stay tonight and tonight only." Hopper gave him a look. "She can sleep on either the top or bottom bunk. Not in the same bed."

"What do you think I'd try to do?" Mike replied, squinting at him. "I'm this close to passing out." Mike held his forefinger and thumb close together.

"Okay, good point, but I still don't want you in the same bed." Hopper said. "Now dry your hair and go to bed, you *do* look like you're gonna pass out any second now."

"My hair *is* dry?" Mike said, confused.

"Dude, you're hair is literally dripping with water." Max said, rolling her eyes.

Mike reached up and touched his head. "Oh." he said softly. Karen couldn't help but snort, taking the towel from around his shoulders.

"Sit down on the stairs and I'll dry it." Mike didn't even arguing, doing what his mother asked.

"I'd better head out, but I'll see you bright and early after work tomorrow, okay?" Hopper asked.

"*What*?" she asked, eyebrows raising. He chuckled.

"I was joking. I'll see you between five and six o'clock."

"Alright. Love you dad." she hugged him.

"I love you too, kid. Bye, Wheeler, don't test my patience by sleeping in the same bed as my daughter." Mike just waved him off as his mom attacked him with the towel, feeling like a kid who just got out of the bath and his mom was drying his hair again. Hopper chuckled and waved to Max, "Oh, and someone is gonna need to put something on his hands and bandage him up again." he said before finally leaving.

"I'll go get the stuff to do it. I've had a lot of skating injuries so I know how to treat them." Max said, before making her way down the hall to the kitchen.

"My God, Michael, you need a haircut." Karen said, taking the towel off his head. His hair poofed out slightly, random, frizzy curls sticking out all over, and Max and El giggled. She ran her fingers through it.

"No, 'cause last time I got a haircut I got a bowl cut."

"Hey, Will has a bowl cut." Max said, poking her head back around the corner.. "You're insulting your friend!"

"You're a bowl cut." he muttered, resting his head against Karen's leg. Max made a face.

"Yep, time for bed. C'mon." Karen tapped his head a couple times and he sat up, grumbling as he stood. Still, he gave El a grin and held out his hand to her. She gladly took it and followed him up to his room.

"You want the top or the bottom?" Mike asked her, slightly swaying on his feet. She giggled.

"Top is okay. I don't think you can climb."

"I'll have you know I'm a great climber." he retorted.

"Mike you couldn't climb the rope out of the tunnels. Stop lying to your girlfriend." Max said as she passed his room, heading to Nancy's room to ask where the bandages she used were.

"Shut up, Max." he grumbled. El just grinned.

"Hey, I know you guys wouldn't be trying anything but… if El *accidentally* gets into bed with you, I won't say anything. Just leave the door open." Karen said.

"But… the dog." he said.

"I'm gonna put Holly's old baby gate at the bottom of the stairs. She can't get up here, then."

"Oh." he nodded and fell flat on his face on his bed.

"Mike, get under your covers." he groaned but slid until he was half off the bed and pulled the covers back, climbing back into bed, but stayed sitting up because he'd fall asleep otherwise and Max still had to fix his hands. Karen walked over and leaned down, kissing him on the forehead.

"Telling us all that really took a lot out of you, huh?" Mike nodded, blinking slowly at her. She smiled and ruffled his hair a little. "Go to sleep, I'll see you in the morning, or whenever you get up." he nodded.

"If you need anything, let me know, okay El?" Karen said, giving the girl a quick hug. El nodded.

"Goodnight, Mrs. Wheeler."

"Call me Karen." she chuckled. "And goodnight."

El turned to her boyfriends bed, where he was two seconds away from falling asleep, despite sitting up. She climbed in next to him, and though it was a tight squeeze, was able to get comfortable.

"You don't have to stay with me right now, El." Mike told her quietly, practically squinting at her. "It's still early."

"It's okay." El replied. Mike opened his eyes long enough to look at his alarm clock.

"It's not even 8:30, El, go hang out with Max if you want to."

"Do you want me to leave?" she asked.

"No, no, no, no, I just… I don't want you to feel like you *have* to stay with me after what I said."

"Oh."

"Because you don't have to. I'll be alright if you leave for a little bit. I'll leave you some space."

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"One hundred and eleven percent sure." she giggled at that.

"Okay. I'll go hang out with her after she does your hands." El told him. He smiled and nodded.

Just a minute or so later, Max came back in, hands full of different things. Mike didn't know what half of them were but he wasn't gonna ask.

"Okay Wheeler, hold your hands out so we can get this done as fast as possible." Max told him.

"Okay." he did as he was told, resting his elbows on his knees. He watched her put rubbing alcohol on a paper towel, and hissed when she dabbed at his hands with it.

"Sorry." she muttered. "I know it sucks but it's even worse if it gets infected."

"S'fine." he replied, grimacing a little. She put some other ointment on them, in a yellow tube- he couldn't for the life of him remember the name of it right now- and quickly, but carefully wrapped his hands back up, tight enough to actually do some good, but not too tight to be uncomfortable. "You should be a nurse." he muttered, blinking sleepily. She snorted.

"Imagine that, me, a nurse! I couldn't do it." she shook her head. "I can't handle the goopy puke and sick people." he shrugged in response and she snorted. "Well, there you go. I'll change them again sometime tomorrow. Your mom will probably do it for you while I'm

at school." he nodded. "Night, turd."

"Night." he replied, sniffing a little. El stood as he lied on his back, pulling the covers up, and said,

"Yell if you need me." she pecked him on the lips, walking backwards behind Max.

"I will. Goodnight, El."

"Goodnight, Mike."

Tuesday, February 26, 1985

"Hey El, wake up." El felt someone poking her shoulder lightly, their soft voice slowly waking her up. She opened her eyes and saw Nancy standing above her, book bag thrown over her shoulder. "Good morning, sunshine." she joked. El smiled a little.

"Good morning." El whispered.

"You can go back to sleep, I just wanted to tell you Max and I are leaving for school." she told her. "Mom and Holly are downstairs making breakfast if you do want to stay up and eat."

"I'm gonna stay with Mike. For a few minutes." El told her. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. I'll see you later."

With a little wave, Nancy walked out. As Max passed the door she waved but didn't stop to talk, just about running down the hall to catch up with Nancy.

El looked at her boyfriend, who, as long and gangly as he was, was curled up against the wall, his back to her, sleeping like a rock. She smiled and rolled over, laying next to him and placing her head on the other side of his pillow, nuzzling his back with her forehead and letting out a small breath, soon falling back to sleep.

For the first few seconds of consciousness, Mike didn't know where he was, or what the hell happened. He almost felt like he'd been knocked out, but his head didn't hurt, which confused him.

He tried to turn over, but there was something blocking him, and he nearly jumped when he looked, not expecting El to be asleep next to him. He sat up instead and rubbed at his eyes. He huffed and dropped his hands into his lap, looking at his clock. It was a few minutes after eleven and not one single nightmare. He scratched his head and looked down at El.

"El." he whispered, tapping her shoulder a few times. She let out a little snort and opened her eyes.

"Hey." she said, stretching and sitting up. "Did you sleep good?"

"Ah, yeah, actually. No nightmares at all."

"Good." she smiled at him, and kissed his cheek.

"Good morning you two!" Karen announced her presence and the two jumped.

"Jeez mom!" Mike grumbled.

"I've been standing here for at least five minutes, Mike." she chuckled. "It's not my fault you didn't notice me. You missed breakfast, but I can make you two something now if you're hungry."

The couple nodded and got out of bed, following Karen downstairs. El went into the living room with Holly while Mike made his way to the bathroom.

"Hi El." Holly grinned sweetly at her. El waved at her and sat on the couch. "Can I ask question?" she asked in her little voice.

"Yes." El nodded.

"Why is Mikey sad?" she asked, tilting her head to the side a bit.

"Oh." El bit her lip. "Um. Mike has been… tired, a lot." Holly nodded, listening intently. "He has bad dreams, sometimes… about bad men."

"Like my daddy?" Holly asked. El swallowed and thought for a few seconds. She knew it wasn't right to talk bad about someone, especially to their child but… technically, Holly said it.

"Yeah, like him." El nodded.

"Daddy is mean to him. I don't like mean."

"I don't either." El agreed. "Mike is… okay now, though. He's gonna get better."

"Mhm." Holly agreed, smiling. "Because you make him better. Thank you for makin' him feel better." Holly threw her arms around El and hugged her tightly. El jumped slightly, surprised, but hugged the toddler back, a small smile on her face. She kissed the side of her head and rested her chin on Holly's little shoulder.

In the hallway, Karen and Mike looked at each other, one of the biggest grins on Mike's face. Karen hadn't seen it in a while. She ruffled his hair and went back in the kitchen to finish lunch.

Mike waited until Holly let El go, and walked in, making as much noise with his feet as he could so they'd know he was coming.

"What are you two ladies doing?

"So…" Steve said, sitting on the hood of Jonathan's car. "Yesterday was… something."

Nancy scoffed. "You're telling me. I didn't sleep that much 'cause I was afraid Mike would have a nightmare and start screaming or something. I've never heard him before, but I guess since I knew he was having nightmares messed me up."

"He didn't, though, did he?"

"As far as I know, no. El was with him last night." she said. "He was conked out this morning, didn't move a muscle when I woke El up to tell her we're leaving."

"We?" Jonathan asked.

"I took Max to school this morning. She's staying with us right now."

"Why? What happened?" Steve demanded.

"She asked if she could stay with someone last night. Apparently Billy isn't gonna be home this week, and she's scared to stay alone at her house without him there. She didn't actually say she was scared, but I put two and two together."

"Are you actually kidding?" Steve asked. Nancy shook her head.

"Yep. Hopper talked to her last night after everything with Mike, and then mom joined them to see what was going on, and she's gonna stay with us until Billy gets back. After that, well… I don't know what's going to happen there."

"Christ. Remind me to talk to that little shit." Steve ran a hand over his face. "Now, onto another little shit. How's Mike doing now?"

"Well, as I said earlier-" she gave him a look.

"I wasn't paying attention."

"You're an idiot." she rolled her eyes.

"He didn't have any nightmares last night." Jonathan answered for her. "And he was still sleeping this morning when she left."

"Ah okay." Steve nodded. He took a bite of his sandwich. "Question for Nancy." he said, mouth full of food.

"What?" she asked, sipping her drink.

"Mike doesn't have any older brothers." he said. Jonathan let out a sigh and smacked his head against the drivers side window, where he was standing.

"Obviously not." then she thought about it. "Well, debatable. I don't know how old dad's other *kids* are. He might have an older brother- hell, I *could* have one." she rolled her eyes, huffing as she crossed her arms over her chest.

"He can go fuck himself." Jonathan muttered. Nancy and Steve nodded in agreement.

"We could be his big brothers." Steve pointed to himself and Jonathan. Nancy raised an eyebrow.

"I can see Jonathan being his big brother… I think he says you're just a babysitter- I'm joking, Steve, I'm joking." she couldn't help but laugh at the offended look on his face. "I'm assuming you two've already talked about this, so what're you guys thinking?"

"Well… Anyone in a ten mile radius can tell that Mike had an awesome time when he and Hop went out that night." Jonathan started. "And it was doing stuff he liked to do, and something new Hopper did with him. We were thinking we could do that with him? Ya know, I already feel like he's my little brother, what with knowing him since he was five, and all… and really, I want him to be happy too, and do stuff he wants."

"I agree. We're not forcing him to watch sports and other shit like that unless he wants to. If he wants to spend four hours at the arcade beating my ass at Pac-Man he can have at it." Steve said, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. Nancy snorted.

"You are really bad at it. And it's so easy!"

"Not when like four ghosts are trying to eat you or whatever the hell they're doing!" Steve exclaimed. Nancy rolled her eyes.

"But what do you think? Would you be alright with us doing that?" Jonathan asked.

"Well I mean… it's not my decision, is it? I don't care, I'd be glad for you guys to! It's up to Mike to let you in, though, we've never had deep conversations or really spent any time together other than fighting monsters and shit, so I don't know how easy it'll be to get him to do stuff outside of his friend group, you know?"

"We get it." Steve nodded in understanding. "We're not gonna just kidnap him and make him go places, just talk to him more and suggest doing things and see how he acts. And of course we'll do shit

with the rest of the little shitheads, not just Mike, but you know what we mean."

"I know." Nancy chuckled. "And stop calling my brother a shithead, shithead!"

Max was *furious* as she stared at the popular girl in front of her, said girl bragging about how fast she was able to get the news of Mike's parents around.

"You bitch!" Max damn near shrieked, storming up to her in the hallway. Stacy immediately turned in her direction, a scowl on her face.

"Excuse me? I know you're not talking to me, tomboy." she rolled her eyes, looking at her friends as if that was a good insult, when it really wasn't to begin with.

"Damn right I'm talking to you, *bitch*. How *dare* you spread this shit about Mike around! Do you not have a heart?" Max demanded.

"Not for his nerdy ass, no, I don't. All he's useful for is to cheat off him." Stacy shrugged.

"You're nothing but shit, Stacy. You're just jealous that you're nowhere near as smart as him."

"I'm jealous of *no one*." Stacy snickered. Max scoffed.

"Sure. You're really just making a fool of yourself. You really think any of us care that you're popular or what outfit you're wearing today? No, we fucking don't, Stacy. And you *are* jealous of someone! And that someone is-"

Lucas rushed forward and grabbed Max's arm, trying to pull her away from the popular girl before she started trying to fist fight- he knew it was only a matter of time.

"-Mike's older sister! Don't think I didn't see you watching her dance with Dustin at the Snowball!"

"Max, she's not worth getting in trouble over, c'mon." Lucas pulled at her arm.

"No, fuck her! She deserves to know how shitty she is! Stop trying to ruin everyone's lives, Stacy, bullying and spreading rumors and shit is only gonna make you look stupid in the long run, so how about think with your *own* head, and fucking stop." with a huff and not another word, Max grabbed her boyfriend this time, and pulled him along with her as she stomped towards the door. "And you better fucking believe I'm gonna snitch on her ass for cheating."

Meanwhile, Will and Dustin were waiting for the couple at the bike rack when Troy and James walked up. Troy's nose had a white strip over the top of it, dark bruises surrounding it and under his eyes.

"I'm assuming Frogface got in trouble? That why he's not here?" Troy asked, grinning smugly.

"Nope." Dustin shook his head. "His mom was so proud of him for punching your face in she let him stay home today."

The grin fell from Troy's face and he glared. James mouth dropped open in surprise.

"Seriously, where's the dickhead at?" Troy demanded.

"He's not here, Troy, the fuck else you want me to say?" Dustin said, rolling his eyes. Then, hardly two seconds later, Dustin was sprawled out on top of he and his friends bikes.

"Hey!" Will exclaimed.

"Back off, Zombie Boy." James hissed. Troy grabbed Dustin by the collar of his shirt and hauled him up, slamming him against the bike rack.

"Keep talking shit, Toothless. You don't know what I can do to you-"

"Oh but will you do it?" Dustin asked. "You don't have the nerve to do *shit*." Dustin saw Mr. Clarke making his way towards them quickly, eyes about to bug out of his head. He smirked at Troy.

"The fuck are you-" Troy started, but was interrupted.

"HEY!" someone barked. "What's going on here?" Hopper demanded, stomping up to the teens and grabbing Troy by the back of his shirt and pulling him away from Dustin.

"Yeah, what the fuck?" Max asked, stopping next to Will, Lucas behind her.

"Ms. Mayfield." Mr. Clarke sighed.

"Red." Hopper snapped.

"Sorry." she muttered.

"What's going on here?"

"He keeps talking shit to me sir-" Troy said, putting on an act.

"Oh shut it, I wasn't talking to you. I know all about you and what you've done to these kids. Henderson, Byers, what happened?"

Dustin went on to explain how Troy was looking for Mike and then pushed him into the bike rack. James slowly started backing up, to try and get away, but Mr. Clarke grabbed his shoulder.

"Uh uh." he shook his head. "You stay right here."

"What were you going to do to Mike? Hm?" Hopper asked.

"Do *you* see what *he* did to me?" Troy shrieked. "He broke my nose!"

"It was well deserved." Hopper said, scratching his beard. "You and you." he pointed at Troy and James. "Are going to follow Mr. Clarke here to the principal's office. I'll be in shortly to discuss your punishment, because it seems you were looking to hurt, Mike, weren't you?"

"No-!"

"Sure, Mr. Clarke?"

"Yes sir." Mr. Clarke nodded. "Boys, go to the principal's office. I'll be

right behind you." he turned to Max. "Real quick, what was going on between you and Stacy in the hall?" Max practically gasped at that and clapped her hands.

"Oh my *God* Mr. Clarke you have no idea how I wanted to yank that damn scrunchie out her head- she's the one who's been telling everyone about Mike's family. She heard you and Mrs. Wheeler talking about it and immediately freaking told the whole school."

"I see. Well-"

"Also, she's been cheating off Mike in every class they share, she told me herself." Max added.

'It's true, I heard her." Lucas nodded in agreement.

"I see. I'll take care of it. Thank you, kids." he turned and made his way back into the school, grabbing Stacy on his way back in. Everyone turned to Hopper.

"Are you kids alright, though? No harm done?"
"I almost shit myself, but other than that, fine." Dustin said.

"Good, well… I'm gonna go and have a chat with these boys. I'll see you later if you're at Wheeler's house."

"Okay!" they replied in unison.

"Wait, I don't see your truck, how'd you get here?" Will asked.

"I decided to take a walk." Hopper shrugged. "I figured that those two would be waiting for Mike, so I decided to come see for myself what would happen."

"You sneaky, sneaky man!" Dustin pointed at him. Hopper grinned and made his way into the school. "Man, he's awesome."

The Party spent the next few hours teaching El new games- she was the best at Uno- as Hopper had ended up being a little later than he thought, having to deal with the bullies.

Karen told Hopper about the moment between El and Holly earlier in the day, gushing about how sweet El was.

"It was precious, Hopper, it really was. You should've seen it, she was so careful with her words, it was so sweet. You should've seen how Mike was looking at her- that boy is in *love*."

"Hey kid?" Hopper asked, nudging Mike in the shoulder. He and El were about to take off. Mike turned to look at him and Hopper motioned for him to follow him into the kitchen. Mike did as he was asked and was met with an amused looking Hopper.

"What's up?"

"I know El slept in your bed with you." It took all Hopper had in him to keep from laughing at the horrified expression on the kids face.

"I promise you we didn't do anything- I- I *wouldn't* pressure her to do anything, *oh my God* how did you find out?" Mike babbled, barely taking a breath. Hopper chuckled and put a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm not mad, kid. I knew she'd end up there anyways, it doesn't take a lot for me to figure it out. And I know you wouldn't, kid, we already talked about this once."

"Yeah but… I still wouldn't do anything. Ever." Mike shook his head.

"I know. Also, you need to learn how to take a breath when you babble like that, you're gonna pass out one of these days. Now, go hug El bye, we've gotta go, I've got food in the truck."

Hopper would lie to anyone, but hearing that, and then seeing the way the young couple hugged each other goodbye warmed his heart just a little more- he still had to have that tough exterior, you know? What with being Chief of Police and all, he had a reputation!

"Karen told me about you and little Wheeler's talk today." Hopper told his daughter, who turned and looked at him, eyebrows furrowed.

"She did? She heard?"

"She and Mike both did." he told her.

"Oh."

"I'm proud of you, kid." Hopper told her. "You did good explaining to her."

"I did?"

"Mhm. There wasn't a better way to explain it to her, really, as young as she is." he said, glancing at her. She nodded.

"I like Holly." she said, smiling. "She's very… sweet."

"Kids usually are." he chuckled. "But so are you, though you are a bit of a firecracker at times."

"What's a firecracker?"